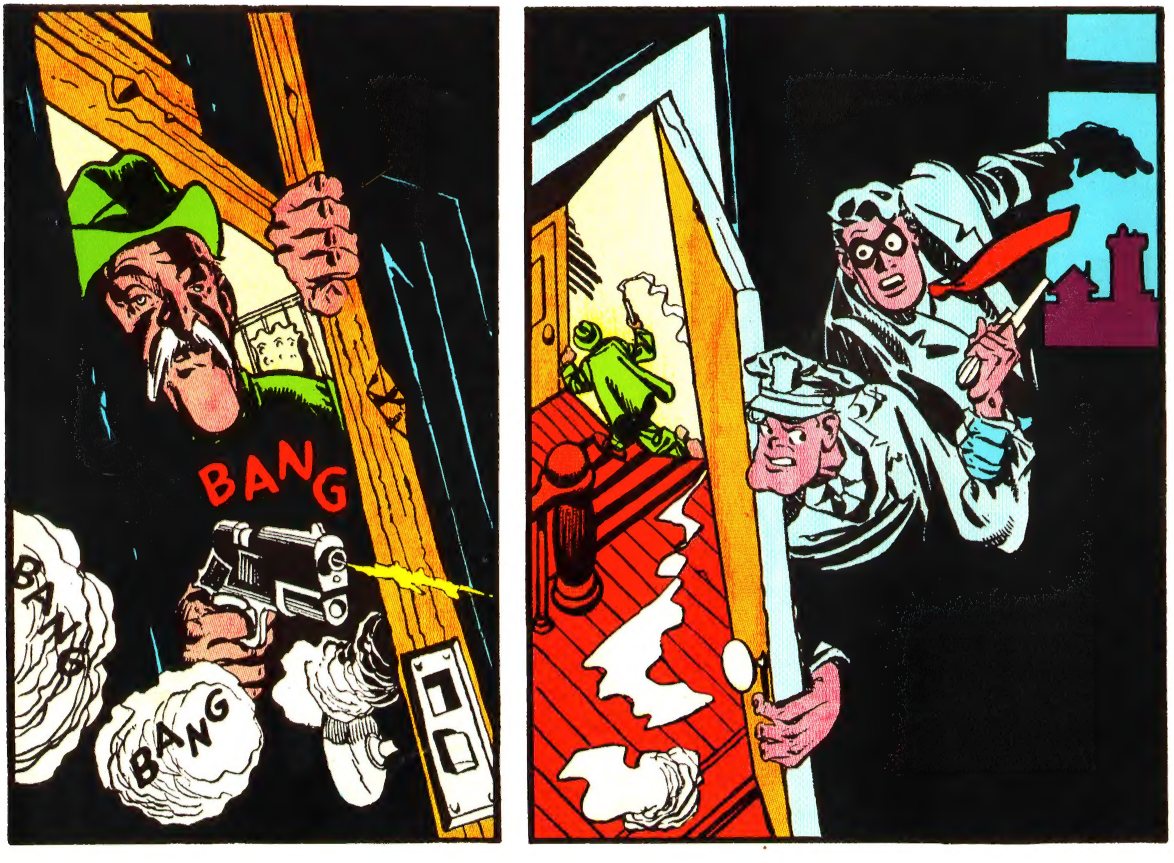
PANELS

NO. 1

$2.50



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

WILL EISNER · JULES FEIFFER · BILL GRIFFITH

Editor and Publisher
JOHN BENSON

Staff
BILL PECKMANN
JAY SPICA

CONTENTS

ART AND COMMERCE An Oral Reminiscence by Will Eisner 4
JULES FEIFFER TALKS ABOUT *THE SPIRIT* 22
A SOUR LOOK AT THE COMIX SCENE by Bill Griffith 28
REVIEWS by Bill Mason, Art Spiegelman, David Kasakove, John Benson and Joe Pilati 30

LETTERS. Future issues of *Panels* will have a letters page. Comments and opinion regarding any aspect of this issue will be received with interest.

Thanks to Jerry De Fuccio, Ron Goulart, Bill Pearson and Robert Wiener. Thanks to Mike Barrier for thinking of the title *Panels*. Typesetting by LUNA Publications.

PANELS # 1, Summer 1979. Entire contents copyright © 1979 by John Benson. Cover and pictorial material on pages 2, 3, 4, 13-21, 24 and 25 all © 1979 by Will Eisner. Pages 28 and 29 © 1979 by Bill Griffith. Published by John Benson, 205 W. 80th Street, # 2E, New York, N.Y. 10024. Panels welcomes contributions, which should be accompanied by a stamped self addressed envelope, but cannot assume responsibility for same. Printed in USA.

That Will Eisner is a member of the comics pantheon there is no doubt. One has only to read a sampling of his Spirit *stories to know that his place is secure. It is not quite so easy, however, to* describe *Eisner's genius as a comics artist.*

Of course, there are Eisner's marvelous, and justly famous, splash pages for The Spirit, *with the title intricately worked into some night-enveloped cityscape, and his feeling for chiaroscuro, deep shadows and dramatic "camera angles," coupled—paradoxically—with a dry sense of humor. One can speak, as Jules Feiffer does in these pages, of "the Eisner lower-class feeling, that German Expressionist sense of what life is really like," or highlight, as Marilyn Mercer did in the January 9, 1966 New York* Herald-Tribune, *the "great virtuosity in his writing." Considered together, these elements of Eisner's art give a partial idea of his creative genius. Mercer's point about Eisner's excellence as a* writer *seems particularly apt: ". . . most adventure strips," as she elaborates, "were at best semi-literate, and this may be an overstatement;* The Spirit *was not only literate, it was literary in the exact meaning of the word." But the list is somehow incomplete—Eisner's work contains* more *than these elements, something difficult to define.*

Perhaps the key element is Eisner's effortless visual narrative style, which is so unlabored that most readers are unaware of how much more his pictures tell us than do the pages of most comic books. Like Alfred Hitchcock, Eisner shows *his stories instead of telling them. And Eisner's pictorial sense, like Hitchcock's, is so integral to his sense of narrative that it's often overlooked: the type of story favored by the artist is more likely to be recognized—the "Hitchcock story" or the "Eisner story."*

Eisner's greatest assets are his constant, effortless use of a great variety of human expressions and postures (to mention nothing of the variety of his characters), his sense of the right number of panels for a given sequence and of which moments of the action to depict, and—most important—his way of juxtaposing the units of action in adjacent panels and his use of indirect *portrayal: we are shown a reaction, or the aftermath of an action, rather than the action itself—and are thereby forced, usually without our being aware of it, to imagine bits of action and story elements that Eisner has not actually shown.*

Eisner is often thought of as an artist who abandoned his art, in the early fifties, to pursue business interests. However, one should bear in mind that in 1940 he gave up a successful business *career for a course of action that allowed him to be a working* artist. *Prior to that time Eisner's successes had really all been of a business nature. He had applied management skills to an assembly-line technique of producing art that made him, as he told Mercer, "very rich before I was 22." Though Eisner did work seriously as an artist, on features like* Hawks of the Seas, *prior to 1940, his creative skills were more often used to develop saleable art styles and characters which he then got other artists to draw.*

Against the advice of his peers, Eisner turned away from this lucrative venture and took up a format which allowed him to display his real talents as a narrative artist for the first time. The creation of The Spirit *newspaper supplement was certainly a business decision—but it was also the decision of a man eager for artistic opportunities. The great problem for every comics artist has always been a financial one—the poor financial return has forced many good artists to leave the field—and Eisner had solved this problem by running a "shop." But evidently he remained unsatisfied artistically.* The Spirit *gave Eisner the opportunity he wanted to make money* as an artist *on a scale commensurate with his abilities.*

The supplement also gave him a newspaper audience sophisticated enough to allow him to exploit the full range of his talents and the latitude to do occasional "uncommercial" stories without having to worry about sales. His decision to hold out against the syndicate's desire for a costumed hero was the final vital element; the format he created for The Spirit *left him free to develop the series in his own way and to tell an unusually wide variety of stories.*

Now, after a long absence, Eisner has returned as an artist, with his book of four short stories in comics form, A Contract With God. *Fortunately, years of supervising the production of Army maintenance handbooks and the like have not diminished his craft. His decision to do a "serious" book of comics was fraught with pitfalls. On hearing of the project, one feared the possibility of cityscapes made up of exaggerated hackneyed* Spirit *splash pages, or a book of "pretty pictures" in the Hogarth mold. But Eisner has not succumbed. The city in his book has the look and feel of the actual Bronx depression tenements of his youth in which the stories are set. And he has fully utilized all the comics forms and techniques that have served him well (including line drawings and hand lettered balloons) to tell, with sequential pictures, personally felt narratives. One need look no further to see Eisner's command of his medium than the wordless two page sequence in "The Super" in which the super matter-of-factly adjusts the boiler, calmly shuts himself in his room with the poisoned body of his brute of a dog, and then clutches the beast's carcass to him in a spasm of grief. It's a powerfully captured moment of human emotion that sticks in the mind. Perhaps* A Contract With God *is no greater than the best of Eisner's* Spirit *stories, but it is surely nothing less. It is a fine book that deserves more than one careful reading. At a time when the comics form is so often being used for empty bombastic displays of one kind or another, the personal artistic statement this book represents is heartening.*

COMIC BOOK SECTION

Copyright, 1942, by Everett M. Arnold

The Sunday Star
WASHINGTON, D. C.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 1942

ACTION Mystery ADVENTURE

ART & COMMERCE

AN ORAL REMINISCENCE BY

Will Eisner

I was born in New York City on March 6th, 1917. I have absolutely no way of knowing what stars converged at that time, what great earth shaking events occurred.

My father was an immigrant. He was born in a little village just outside of Vienna, so I am Austrian, I guess, although I understand that the municipality kept changing hands over the years. So I might be Hungarian or Polish by extraction. His father was a kerosene miner or something like that. They weren't farmers.

My mother was conceived in Roumania, born on the boat on the way over here, so she was, I suppose, technically American. I don't know whether the birth occurred in territorial waters or not.

My father actually started life as a painter; he was an artist of sorts. He studied in Vienna, I guess. He said he came to Vienna when he was very young, twelve, thirteen years old, and apprenticed himself to a muralist. There were a number of muralists in Vienna at the time, and they worked in churches, and decorated homes on soft wet plaster. Alfresco was quite a fashion in those days, so wealthy people would hire a muralist to come in and do a whole dining room or a living room. And that was what my father did.

Just prior to the outbreak of World War I he came here; he must have been about twenty-five. He was in his early thirties, I guess, when I was born. He died at 83 or 84, and when he died I was 49 or 50.

His brother was also an artist. He was one of about eleven children. A number of them died, or were scattered by the holocaust of World War I and wandered all over Europe.

When he got to this country he couldn't find work in church murals, but he did paint scenery—backdrops for vaudeville and the Jewish theatre. Later, when the work slowed, he became a house painter for a while, and that didn't suit him. He finally became involved in a company in New Jersey that painted metal beds to look like wood. He was very skilled at that, and did that for a while until he became ill. He never really was able to get back, so he finally went into the manufacturing of fur coats and opened up a factory until 1929, when the crash wiped him out.

My father was very old school. He still fancied himself an intellectual back in Vienna in the coffee houses, and I think he would really have loved to have remained with that whole Bohemian group for the rest of his life. But here in America he became a businessman. It became his major effort, at which he never really succeeded in any large scale. He was always involved in some wild scheme or other.

Do you have any siblings?

I have a brother four years younger, and a sister about thirteen years younger. My brother Julian, we call him Pete, worked with me in the publishing business beginning in 1950 and stayed with me twenty-two years. He's not an artist; he's an awfully good production man and has talents in other areas.

Well, my early home life was spent in upper-lower-class poverty. Which was probably lower-middle-class as the sociologists put it. There's upper-upper-lower-class, and lower-lower-middle-class, and then lower-middle-class and middle-class. So somewhere between middle-class and poor is where I was living, although we regarded ourselves as middle-class. The family had a sense of pride, and lived well above our means, with as much dignity as we could muster. I think we were quite poor and didn't know it. But we always sort of managed somehow.

My mother was very typical of the girls of that era. She had no formal education. She came over here and as soon as she could stand up straight, I suppose, she was working in a factory, a very typical factory girl of the period. She worked in hat factories until she married my father.

My father was very interested in literature and painting and so forth, but he was not a highly literate man. He had difficulties with the language here, but was in love with the classics. He had the feeling, which I suppose I inherited from him . . . it was that atmosphere in the house. He would buy books. His *proudest* possession was a one volume life of Julius Caesar, which was given to him by his night school teacher. He had gone to night school to learn English when he got here, and he apparently did well and was given this book for a prize. I remember the book because I illustrated it. I decided for a while when I was a kid I was going to do book illustrations. So I made illustrations and leaved them into the book. I did a rather gory illustration of the death of Caesar at the hand of Brutus. I remember it very clearly. It was really a proud possession of his.

My father painted—he never could really draw. My father hadn't lost his ability to draw; he never *really* learned how to draw a figure. He never learned anatomy, really. Most of what he did was by rote, so that his work always had this calendar painting look. He was very skilled at doing cartouches and decorative things. He knew all the techniques of painting and so forth, but he could never really go beyond that.

For a while I was very interested in painting. I wanted to be a painter, which of course upset my mother terribly because she was the practical one in the family. She was a very pragmatic woman in many ways—totally surprised and really dismayed by art in itself. She felt it was a *hobby*. She never thought of it as a vocation or as a life work. She was terrified that I would go that route. And she and my father were at loggerheads. I remember her accusing him of leading me into it almost as though he were a dope pusher. She'd say, "Don't encourage him; you're going to ruin him. He's going to wind up in some attic somewhere starving to death!" She had a very practical sense and was very contemptuous of any effort made on the line of art for art's sake. If I would show her something I did, she would immediately want to know what the market value of it was. That was her thinking.

And yet she was a remarkably astute and clever woman, and had a great deal of heart, a very decent woman. It was the atmosphere in which she grew up; things were a matter of survival. Economic security was her key. I recall she finally

compromised. One day we were sitting talking in the little kitchen, and she said, "If you're going to go into art," and she sighed very heavily as though to say, if I can't stop you, "at least be an art teacher, because I heard from a friend of mine that art teachers get a steady salary. They don't make much, but they get a good income, and they get two months off in the summer. And they get retirement pay." And then she said, "I would be able to face my friends a little bit more. Then I could say, 'Well, you're an art teacher.' That has some dignity to it." That was her fond hope, and she was broken-hearted when I didn't go on to Syracuse where there was a scholarship available and I couldn't afford to take it. I just couldn't afford to go to college. They were flat dead broke.

I mean, we talk in this era about being broke, but when you suddenly discover that your parents have something like seventy-five dollars in the bank, which represented the *total* amount they were able to salvage out of the collapse of the Bank of the United States . . . As always, my father seemed to be right in the eye of the disaster. I recall a very sad scene at home one evening when he announced that he had just come from the bank, there was a big line, they had shut the doors, nobody could go in and get their money, and we were dead broke. Zero. We had enough to pay for two, three months rent, I recall him saying. It was a family question what to do about it.

And yet somehow or other we managed to live. I recall in his more affluent times we had a car. He bought a Ford and drove me around through Central Park. And I recall he took me past the one traffic light in the city, and told me that some day there would be a lot of these traffic lights, he hoped. Because, he said, that was going to be the thing of the future. He was always fascinated with that kind of thing. He'd clip little filler articles about unique things around the country. In fact, that book I did, *Facts, Statistics and Trivia*, was sort of inspired by that idea.

We, later, as I grew older, found our way into a "better neighborhood" . . . peopled by policemen, civil servants, postmen. These were, in those days, people to envy, because those were good solid jobs; twenty-five dollars a week, *every* week, with a pension some time in the future. It was security.

I recall comparing notes with Jules Feiffer one day, because his background was pretty much like mine. He passed through the same thing, only about fifteen years later. And he said his parents didn't even have the dignity of being poor. I always remembered that remark because it describes what very few people understand.

Just as you try to explain to your children about what the Depression was like and it's hard now for anybody to understand. "What do you mean, there were no jobs? I mean, you could always go out and sweep floors, somebody would pay something." There were just no jobs! Seeing people in chesterfield coats with velvet collars and a nice bowler hat, good shoes, standing in Wall Street with an orange box selling apples at five cents each. These were weird, almost theatrical scenes. People who had a car in the yard, a very good car, which they couldn't drive because they didn't have the money for gasoline. They couldn't sell it. And anyway, they didn't want to give it up. Some kind of times. They helped shape your outlook. But in the main, I can say that I lived within a family that had some feeling of dignity.

Finally, just before entering high school, or the early part of high school, I was selling newspapers down on a Wall Street corner. So you might say I began my career in newspaper marketing and distribution. As the depression continued, I maintained myself in high school selling art work, posters, and stuff like that on the side to make a few dollars, and selling newspapers in the afternoon.

I went to elementary schools in various places, Brooklyn and the Bronx. And very early in elementary school, when I was seven or eight, I became very interested in art. I spent a lot of time drawing. I recall my father telling me that he was very pleased at my showing talent, and got very interested in it. I showed a greater interest in art than I did at academic subjects. I was good at writing; I remember my teachers telling me that.

I recall my father finding some art school in an effort to help me along, which had a system of teaching art by strapping your arm to a kind of machine which would guide your hand. My father was always intrigued with that kind of instant educational thing. I suppose I got from him a love for all kinds of machinery.

I was very friendly with a boy named Fred, whose last name I don't remember, when I was about eight years old. He had a brother who was working in the early Max Fleischer Studios as a cartoonist. Animation had been proliferating. We went up to visit the studio once, and I decided at that time that that was going to be my career.

And I recall doing a lot of drawing, drawing on the streets and sidewalks. I was amused when I went to Denmark a couple of years ago to discover that students were making great chalk drawings on the sidewalks, and it was regarded as a rather new thing. But it wasn't new with kids in New York.

I went to De Witt Clinton High School, and my interest in art and writing of course sharpened there. It had a good teaching staff. I got into De Witt Clinton in the black depths of the Depression, between 1932 and 1936, I've forgotten the exact dates now. It was a very good school in those days. It had a huge mix, a lot of black students, and a huge mix of economic levels, which was unique then. There were so-called "wealthy kids," as well as very poor ghetto kids. It started as Boys' High and became De Witt Clinton later, so it had a lot of kids from Hell's Kitchen and so on.

They had a very good art department. And they had a good newspaper program and a unique journalism class run by a teacher who is still alive and with whom I keep in very active touch still, a fellow by the name of Ray Phillipson who is very beloved by all of us. In fact, he influenced a great many people who became successful in the publishing field.

And I became interested in theatre, I got involved with Adolph Green, doing class shows and so forth, and I thought very seriously for a while of becoming a set designer. I had a whole range of experiences. I was very active in school politics. I was active on the newspaper. I started a comic strip in the school newspaper, my first comic strip.

Bob Kane was a fellow student. Bob and I became very close friends for a while, and we also knew each other after after we finished school. When I opened up the studios he did a feature for me, about a cat or something. Oh yes, *Peter Pupp* it was called.

While I was at De Witt Clinton I used to take on summer scholarships. A lot of the art schools in the area, like the Art Students League and there was a school of commercial art somewhere, they'd offer scholarships to the better students in the high schools in an effort to bring a whole bunch of paying students with them, because things were so bad in those days. Generally the kid who was good enough to win the scholarship would have a little entourage of followers who were perhaps more affluent and could pay the tuition. So he would pay for himself by bringing in the three or four other kids. That's how I got my art education, actually.

The Art Students League was probably the most fruitful of all for me. The thing that really I attribute most of my drawing ability to is the period I studied with George Bridgman, who was a great anatomist. And I studied painting with Robert Brackman. So actually the greatest part of my formal art education came from the Art Students League.

And a lot of it, too, was from hundreds of little places that were set up by the WPA at the time. They'd offer courses and you'd take them because they were free. They were federally funded. But a large portion of my education, like everybody else, was self-education. We would spend a lot of time sketching and drawing and reading and looking.

We saw a great deal of movies. Movies then became the pot,

A COMPLETE STORY
MUSS 'EM UP
BY
WILLIAM EISNER
TONY, HERE, IS DEAD - - I'M BOSS NOW! - - ANY BODY DONT LIKE IT ??- -
- - I SURE HOPE YOU'RE WID US - - - BOSS!
THE HEADQUARTERS OF A SMALL GANG

OCT. 1ST.
- GOT ALL DE DOUGH BOYS ???
YEH! C'MON BOSS DE OL' MAN'S TOO SCART TO DO ANY THING- - - WE'LL JUS' TIE HIM UP!!
- WELL - I'LL JUST MAKE SURE - - YOU'RE TOO OLD TO LIVE MISTER!! - AN' I DONT LIKE YOUR FACE !!!
BANG!
DEC.8
OCT.10
OCT.20
AL BANK
TAKE YER TIME IN THERE BOYS - DIS COP WONT BOTHER US
SO- YOU RECOGNIZE ME EH?? WAL AINT DAT NICE!!- -
- I TOLD YOU NOT TO MAKE ANY NOISE!! - - - I'LL BE RIGHT 'WITCHA' BOYS - -
BANG!

This page of "Muss 'Em Up" is from Keen Detective Funnies *Vol. 2 No. 6, June 1939, where it appeared in black and white with a few dashes of red. Six months earlier the same story appeared in a different format in the undersized (6½ x 9½ inch)* Little Giant Detective Funnies *No. 4, January 1939. Strangely, the* Little Giant *appearance is the paste-up version, which suggests that there was an even earlier original appearance of the story. It's difficult to make any sense out of the page in the* Little Giant *version because the bank sign, a gunshot, and some dates and balloons have been eliminated in the paste-up process.*

the drug for all of us. So Saturday afternoon was spent in going to the movies, movies, movies. And pulps! I was an avid pulp reader.

Your interest in the theatre, did that ever . . .

It didn't materialize. That fell apart on the guillotine of economic decisions. There was a fellow named Dunkel I was at De Witt Clinton with, and his father had a firm that made all the scenery for the Metropolitan Opera. I was very excited about that, because what I really wanted to do was stage sets. I thought that was the greatest. I used to make sketches, and we made models, and I did very *avant garde* stuff. Then he came and said we could get a job; his father had worked it so we could go with a roadshow and do stage sets, that is, paint the scenery and so forth. And maybe occasionally design something.

I was all excited and went home, and my mother was dead against it . . . great Victorian thinking. Oh, she had an aunt or a sister who was a show girl, and that was a terrible life. And this would lead to all kinds of terrible things for her boy. And not only that, but I had to stay around and make some money, and what they offered to pay us on the road show was just nothing; just room and board. So there'd be no money going home and I had to do something more gainful. So that fell apart.

But I think by then I was beginning to see that what turned me on, really, was the idea of print. I still like it. Of all the media, print has always been the most attractive to me. There's a permanence to it. There's an intimacy in reading that to me transcends motion pictures. People ask me, "With your theatrical approach to things, why didn't you go into motion pictures? Why haven't you been in animation?" And the reason is that film never seemed to me to be satisfying, and that's probably why I didn't pursue it heavily. I have had several opportunities to go into film, I've always been on the border of it. But working with live actors is something . . . I suppose there isn't that kind of instant response that print gives me. When copies get printed, it's there, it exists, and you can look at it any time you want.

I did some acting too for a while. Again in high school. High school was tremendous; to me it was everything. The four years at De Witt Clinton gave me probably all that I could have gotten anywhere. I suppose had I gone on to college I

might have gotten a different dimension. I might have been somebody totally different. But those formative years were very satisfying. I had an opportunity to try almost everything.

For example, a fellow student, Ken Ginniger (who later became a publisher with Prentice Hall), and I started our own underground journal; the first publishing venture I ever went into, a literary journal called *The Hound and Horn*, or, I think it was *Lion and Unicorn*. I've forgotten. Something like that. It was very snooty. We were all into T.S. Eliot, and that was *the* thing . . .

We got a printer somewhere down on Varick Street. See, paperbacks in those days were a very snooty format. The French, ever since Zola's day, had paperbacks. Generally they were the printer's remainders, and he would simply wrap brown paper around them. In fact, that was the way a lot of the French books were sold, because that was the only way of getting them to students cheaply.

So we put out this thing, which had poetry and writings, and some erotic writing and so forth—or what was considered at that time erotic writing. And we needed illustrations, and since I was the art director and co-publisher I discovered very quickly that making metal plates—in those days there was no offset to speak of, it was all letterpress—was very costly. And that led me into wood engraving. You could buy wood blocks at that time which were type-high; their height was equal to the height of the type. And so I cut wood engravings for the illustrations for the book, and the printer printed them along with the typeset material.

I learned a lot about wood engraving. In fact, I still have some of the old tools. I had for many years the old blocks. I saved them because . . . every time I hit a new medium I decided *that* was for me and I was going to go on. That's why today I'm very tolerant and very pleased to see a student really get "worked up" about a newly discovered area. I advise students not to worry about being trapped by a given medium. There are so many other factors and events rubbing on a human being that generally speaking unless he makes a mighty mind closing effort he or she will not remain "trapped" for long.

So I would go down to the New School in the evenings. It had just opened up and it was then a very *avant garde* school. It's much more conservative today. There was a painting class or lecture series being given by the muralist Thomas Hart Benton. He was very new and very *avant garde* at the time.

The situation or the mix then in the so-called underground in the new art was not a heck of a lot different than it is today. They're really the same people, and the conversation's the same. It's not quite as political as it was, that's the big difference. In those days there was a lot of political experimentation. Communism was a new concept. Fascism. Technocracy. Socialism. Neo-socialism. All kinds of things. You could be a communist one day, and a fascist or a technocrat the following day. You could get involved in all these unique political systems.

People were dreaming of brave new worlds, and artists kept thinking that under a socialistic or communistic government they wouldn't have to worry about making a living. We could paint, do what we wanted. Nobody really could conceive of the idea that if somebody set up a social system that would free the painter to paint he'd have to paint what they told him to paint, or he'd be anti-establishment. But these things formed part of our mix; each time, they left a little residue, a little spot of paint on you.

In about 1936 I left school and got my first job, with the New York *American* down on South Street; working from nine at night to five in the morning in the advertising department. I was writing copy for small one inch, two inch ads. And laying them out. And if there was an illustration I'd do the illustration and perhaps do some lettering. Although I was an atrocious letterer. I love lettering, but I'm very dependent on people who assist me on lettering. I have come to regard lettering as absolutely integral to the main art itself. I do a lot more of it now because of this.

After a short while I left to free-lance, because I felt I wasn't doing enough art there. Some printer gave me a job as his "art department," and I was very impressed with that. I could free-lance, I had a few accounts, and I would help in the afternoon washing up the press, which helped pay for the space. And then he would turn over to me some of his accounts that needed artwork. My first account was a funeral parlor. I did letterheads and ads for him.

Another job I got I think was my first comic. I sold my first commercial comic—maybe it was the first one anybody did—to Grease Solvent, which was a gritty soap compound for printers and people who work with oils and grease. I got it through the printer; it was his account. I think it was a four page comic on yellow paper, because that was their package color, which told the advantages of using Grease Solvent for washing your hands.

Meanwhile I tried selling cartoons. There was a whole group of guys selling cartoons to *Liberty*, *Judge* and the old *Life*, and they'd go up to the Wednesday sessions where the editors selected cartoons. I was never successful. Bob Kane was, but they would never buy any of my stuff. I tried various places; I even made a stab at fashion illustration, which I bombed out on. They kept saying my stuff looked like comics. And they were right.

Then I stumbled onto a magazine called *Wow*, which was one of the first early attempts at comics, put out by a fellow named Henle on, it was then Fourth Avenue, Park Avenue South now. He had a big loft, and in the back he was manufacturing shirts or something like that. And in the front office he was publishing this magazine. He had inherited this clothing factory from his father, but he really wanted to be a publisher so he had this *Wow* magazine, edited by a fellow named Jerry Iger. Sam Iger, actually; Jerry was a nickname.

And I recall coming up to Iger's office that day with my portfolio. I walked in to show my stuff, and Iger was having a lot of trouble. He was on the phone with the engraver and the engravings were coming out very badly. And he didn't have time to look at my work, so he said, "Look, why don't you walk over to the engraver with me; there's a big crisis." So I did. It was a man named Strauss, one of the first comic book engraving shops in New York. No, I'm sorry it was a man named Vamos. Strauss was running another shop across town; he was later to do the *Superman* stuff.

And I stood there in that engraving shop while they were all arguing about how to fix that terribly botched Ben Day screen. Well, I'd been working in a printing plant and I knew all about engraving, I said, "Why don't you get a burnishing tool. And you can burnish it. You want me to show you?" Well, that stunned everybody. As I remember, the guy said to Iger, "Who's this, your new production man? You ought to hire him." And on the way out Iger said, "Kid, you know a lot about this business. What do you want to do cartoons for? Come and work for me as an assistant." And I said, "No, I really want to do comics."

So anyway he bought a couple of features from me, and I was ecstatic over having made this smash conquest. They were *Hawks* (later *Hawks of the Seas*), *Muss 'Em Up Donovan*, etc. I forget what I got paid a page, but it was a very small fee. And within a couple of months *Wow* collapsed. And Iger was out, broke. And I was owed money. I think there were only three or four issues of *Wow*.

By then, however, I realized that the opportunity for original comic book features was on the rise. I borrowed $35 from my father, who had precious little money, and came to Iger and said, "Look, I've got a proposition for you. Let's open a comic art studio. I'll produce the comics; you do the selling. It seems to be a growing field and there's a lot of opportunity." He had some money, but he didn't want to put any in because he had just been divorced or something and he

THE WORLD'S GREATEST SECRET AGENT
ESPIONAGE
STARRING THE BLACK X
THE EVENTS HEREIN PORTRAYED ARE BASED ON NEWSPAPER REPORTS..
LARGER GROWS THE POOL OF BLOOD THAT FLOODS EUROPE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR-SPREADING NORTHWARD, ENGULFING PEACEFUL NATIONS.
HARK
IN RUSSIA, A HOARSE VOICE BELLOWS..
WE MUST DEFEND OURSELVES FROM FINLAND!
AND THE BEAR THAT WALKS LIKE A MAN HURLS ITS MIGHT ON THE TINY DEMOCRACY.
OUT OF THE MOUTH THAT ONCE CRIED INTERNATIONAL BROTHERHOOD, NOW COME ORDERS TO MARCHING TROOPS... AND COMMANDS TO KILL AND LAY WASTE....
IN AMERICA: DEEP INTEREST AND SYMPATHY SPREADS FOR THE LITTLE DEMOCRACY...
BUT WITH VALOR THE FINNS DEFEND THEIR HOMES.
U.S. GIVES MILLION DOLLAR LOAN TO FINLAND
GIGANTIC CREDIT GIVEN TO FINLAND BY U.S. TREASURY!
MONEY, ARMS GATHER AT ALL PORTS FOR SHIPMENT TO FINLAND...

Smash Comics, No. 10, May 1940.

had need of all the cash he could get. But anyway he agreed. Especially because I agreed to finance the first several months rent. I was 18 or 19 . . . I lied to him; I told him I was 25. He found out the truth later when we formed the corporation and I had to tell him.

We formed a company called Eisner and Iger, and the idea was to produce comic book material. We went into the business of producing comics for the foreign market. We did *Wags* for Joshua Powers, then called Editors' Press Syndicate. They were selling comics all over South America, mostly the regular syndicated comics. And they began to need new stuff, as everybody did at that time. Then I had the idea of taking great classics and breaking them down. The first one was *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* which Dick Briefer did. And I did a couple of features myself.

Briefer was working in your shop?

Dick Briefer was a freelancer. He was a considerably more experienced and older man. His style was very unorthodox; he was a painter really. He would sort of pare down his line with white paint so his pages were thick with paint.

You've got to remember that I had to recruit people from other fields, painters, illustrators, because there weren't any comic book artists as such. And because of the Depression you could always get good artists. There were some crackerjack artists who had no place to sell their work. So it was fairly easy to put together an organization if you could do what I was prepared to do, which was to take these people and teach them a new trade, so to speak, while they worked.

The first work was the pulps. Now I had had some experience with pulps. I sold to, I think it was Street and Smith a feature called *Western Sheriffs and Famous Outlaws*, which was a full page or two page spread in which each month I would discuss a famous sheriff or outlaw, with illustrations. It was sort of like a sports cartoon page. And I did a lot of research; I became an authority on famous gunfighters in the West.

But the pulps were in very bad trouble then. Street and Smith began lowering the price of its pulps, which had been fifteen cents, down to a nickel or a dime. They were looking for new ways to hold on to their circulation. And a couple of pulp publishers decided to put comics in their pulps.

This one publisher, I've forgotten his name, Kelly or Murphy, was desperately in need of material, so I said to Jerry, "Go ahead and tell them we can produce it." And he came back and said that they were willing to pay five dollars a page—because that's what they were paying for the syndicate proofs. And they wanted to know whether he had a staff, and he said yes. I told him to tell them we had five people on the staff. The five people were all me; I did it in different styles. That's probably a famous story now.

So we started a factory producing comics in a tiny little office on Madison Avenue. The concept of the studio was to be a packager, to produce the entire insides of a comic book, and sell it to a publisher who would then publish it. Iger was the salesman of the company; he would go out and sell. And I was the producer. Iger had about 13 years over me, and had been around and knew the business, and was a very aggressive salesman. A good man. He could letter, so he did the lettering. And he had a couple of funny little cartoon characters. But mainly I produced.

Where did Hawks of the Seas *fit into the picture?*

Well, if I recall correctly, when *Wow* collapsed Iger brought those features over as sort of our property because they owed him money and so forth. It was a sort of payoff. So we began using those features, or continuations of them, for Editors' Press. Editors' Press had been a customer of *Wow*; they had been buying foreign rights. I'm a little fuzzy about just exactly where *Hawks of the Seas* made its first appearance. Ultimately it went into *Jumbo*.

But things were moving very rapidly and we began to expand. Within two or three months we had a couple of pulps. Then of course the next big customer to come along was Victor Fox. Fox had originally been an accountant on Donenfeld's staff. By then *Superman* was the hot feature, and *Batman* was just about coming off, and the number of comics began to proliferate on the stands. And Victor Fox apparently became aware of the enormous sales of this thing, so he quit and organized his own comic book publishing outfit.

He knew us and wanted us to produce a package. I think the price had gone up to over $10 a page. We could sell a 64 page comic book for close to $1,000, which was an enormously high price for the entire package, but that included everything ready for the camera. Fox was a real "operator," in quotes. He became a legend in the business. He was a thief in the real, true sense. A real con man.

Anyway, he specified what he wanted. He wanted me to create a character that had a red suit with a design on his chest and so forth and so on. Well, I was very naive at the time. I knew a little about copyright law. Iger was the older and more experienced man. We discussed it, and Iger said, "Well, there's really not much we can do about it. It's his magazine and he's asking for this, and we'll do it for him." I worried about it, but Iger made a very convincing argument, which was . . . that we were *very* hungry. We needed the money badly. At any rate, when the first sequence was finished Fox decided *he* wanted to put the title on, and he called it, strangely enough, *Wonder Man*.

Well, within about two or three months there was a law suit. And I was a material witness. It was quite an interesting experience for me, because late one night Fox had me up to his office, and sat down with me and said, "Now look. You're going to be asked to testify. And I want you to tell them there was no intent to copy." And I said, "As far as I'm personally concerned I had no intent to copy; I was following your

WONDER
No. 1
MAY
10¢
1939
COMICS
EVERY MONTH
FEATURING
14 PAGES OF THE
DARING, SUPERHUMAN
EXPLOITS OF THE
WONDER MAN
64 PAGES of THRILLS
IN FULL COLOR
1000
PRIZES
GIVEN
AWAY
FREE

instructions." "Well," he said, "if you get on the stand and talk like that . . . I owe you three or four thousand dollars and you're not going to collect your money." So I was faced with a very serious decision.

I suppose when you're young it is easier to adhere to principles, I don't know. At any rate, when I did get on the stand and testified under oath, I told the truth, exactly what happened. Of course it resulted in Fox losing the suit. And it resulted in Fox telling me I wasn't going to collect my money. And indeed I didn't. And he owed us at that time—I'll never forget it—three thousand dollars, which was more money than I had ever seen in all my life. And I just thought we were going to go broke.

But fortunately we began getting other business. In fact, hard on the heels of that we had Fiction House, which was another pulp publisher that was looking to expand itself from pulps into comics. And we created an entire line for them. This was about '38, '39. By then I had a 15 man shop.

We also started a little newspaper syndicate, Iger and I, called Universal Phoenix Feature Syndicate. I produced five comic strips, again all by me. We had two salesmen, Reilly and Begg, who ran up and down the Jersey coast selling small towns a single weekly comic page. It wasn't sold for cash, it was sold for space. They would come into a little town like Red Bank, and they'd sell these strips which had five panels, four panels of comics and a blank fifth panel. Then they would go out and sell an advertisement to the local druggist or somebody to insert in the last panel.

And within a couple of months they had quite a little list of papers. The only trouble with it was that they would go into town and collect the money for the ads from the local merchant and pocket it. So when the time came for the customer to pay us (the newspaper) they said, "We already paid." And we were somehow or other screwed out of that deal too. But for a while we had a nice thing going. We would have continued—we managed to get the money back from Reilly and Begg, and send it to the newspapers. Then the newspapers began to cancel, and we were getting bigger and bigger in the comic book end, so it really didn't matter to us.

Then Monty Bourjailly, who had lost his job as head of United Features Syndicate, started a magazine called *Circus*, which lasted maybe three issues. It just died, but he had ideas of putting out a, quote, "quality" magazine. And there I did a feature based on the novels by the early English writer Charles Lever. It was a popular children's adventure, costume period stuff, about two men who had adventures in the Napoleonic Wars.

Many people are not aware that a lot of comic books started and failed, started and failed during that period. It just wasn't a meteoric rise. The only one that had a continuing uninterrupted meteoric rise was DC comics. The whole atmosphere at that time was very exploratory. Then a fellow named Harry "A" Chesler also started a shop. Jack Binder started a shop about the same time. And Fox went broke, and then raised some money and came back in the business again, and this time he had Joe Simon and Al Harvey working for him. And then he went broke again.

Eisner and Iger kept going very nicely. We were doing very well. I created a line called, actually, Educational Comics, and I was going to do in hard covers a series of classics. We did a number of them, but we couldn't find anybody to buy them except in Canada. I remember going down to Kingsford Press and having them make up a test set of books for me in the hard cover format. I had this dream that great classics could be done in comic form.

A lot of features have been credited to me that perhaps I deserve and perhaps I don't. It was my practice to *create* a feature, say, *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle*, maybe do the first two or three stories and gradually pull out and let someone continue it. In this case I did covers and Mort Meskin did the actual page art. It was the only way I could maintain the large output of product. I was writing some of the stories. We had a writer on the staff, a girl named Toni Blum. Bill Bossert was also a writer; he later married Toni Blum. We had George Tuska, Jack Kirby, a fellow named Bryant, Lou Fine, Bob Powell; all were working there. A whole bunch of tremendous people.

I had run it pretty much like an animation shop. I would sit at the head of it, and I would rough the stories or the character I created in blue pencil. Toni would write the balloons. I would rough it out and pass it down to someone like Lou Fine. And it would go around from the illustrator down to the background men, who were generally kids out of school. And then the lettering. Then the clean-up. It was such a carefully planned production that we actually printed the panel borders on art paper, so they didn't even have to do that.

As a matter of fact, that was partly what led to the weird panelization that I'm supposed to be credited for. When the first big *Jumbo* turned out to be a poor marketing venture for Fiction House they decided to go down to small size, a little above regular comic size. So I had to take *Hawks of the Seas* and other features that I did that they were going to reprint, and restrip them for a small page. And in the process you start developing ideas, so I used the circle as a panel, and a diamond and so on, and it began to look very attractive to me. The possibilities were obvious. So that's how that panel breakdown began . . .

We had done some features for "Busy" Arnold of Quality Comics. And late '39, just before Christmas time, Busy came to me and said that the Sunday newspapers were looking for some way of getting into this comic book boom. I didn't know it, but he apparently had George Brenner, who was his editor at the time, try to develop a feature which the syndicate turned down. They thought it was terrible. So he came to me and asked, would I develop a supplement. We discussed it thoroughly, and of course I had ideas. The condition was, of course, that it wasn't going to be a package operation. He said the syndicate, The Register and Tribune of Iowa, was aware of my work and wanted me to create it. I met with Henry Martin, the syndicate man, who said that they saw some of my stuff in comic books. Actually, it was *Hawks of the Seas* that impressed him very much.

So I had a decision to make. I sat down and talked it over with Iger. I really felt this was my chance at the "big time." But I couldn't do both; I couldn't really do a strip and run a package shop. So I said to Jerry, "I'll give you a choice; I'll either buy you out or you buy me out." We were both fifty-fifty owners, and it was a corporation. Well, Iger said, "I'd like to keep the company, I'll buy you out."

But he added some advice. "I think you're nuts to do it. You're doing too well here now. We're making a lot of money; it would be ridiculous. Besides," he said, "the syndicate business is a very risky thing."

But the more he cautioned, the more I realized that I wanted to take the chance. So we struck a price, and I left Eisner and Iger. I opened up a little studio in Tudor City, a two room apartment. Some of the staff agreed to follow me: Bob Powell, Chuck Mazoujian and Klaus Nordling, who had been with us over at Eisner and Iger. And we hired a young studio kid named Kubert. He just helped out at anything.

But there's no Nordling art in the newspaper section for over a year after it started.

Oh that's right. I asked Nordling to come with me, I recall, but he was still committed to doing a bunch of things for Iger. There were a few tight-lipped moments there, because talent was very precious. Bodies were being traded back and forth. Some people wanted to go with me, but I had to say, "You can't come with me because Iger will be mad," and so forth. And Scotty over at Fiction House got miffed that I'd left Eisner and Iger. He couldn't see why I couldn't buy Iger out. He wanted *me* to continue doing *Hawks* and *Sheena* and all

the other features. He offered to give me the money to buy Iger out, which wouldn't have been necessary, because by then I was pretty well heeled. He, too, didn't understand my passion to do my own newspaper feature, to write and draw to an adult audience.

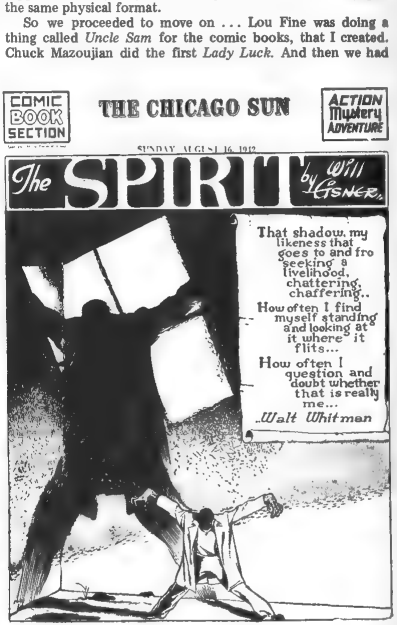
So we formed a company that would publish two or three comic books, as well as the 16 page Sunday supplement with *The Spirit*. I was an owner along with Busy Arnold and Henry Martin, who represented the Register-Tribune Syndicate. It was agreed that Busy Arnold would run the copyright under his name, E.M. Arnold, originally on the ground that if anything happened to me he could get somebody else to do it; it was part of the guarantee. But I had an ownership of the feature from the very beginning; it was a condition that I made. The deal was struck somewhere around November, December 1939. And the first *Spirit* appeared June 2, 1940. I was operating about six weeks ahead, so I actually began working on *The Spirit* in March. I can recall very vividly the first one that I wrote. It was late at night . . . I described the scene on the back of that reprint that came out a while back.

The Spirit section was printed at Greater Buffalo Press in four or five million copies and then distributed to the newspapers with their imprint. That was called readyprint, very much like *Parade*. Some papers carried it as part of their run of press. Later the cost of insertion became a big problem. Originally the newsdealer would insert it along with the magazine section and all the other components. But later on they began charging newspapers for the cost of doing that, as these things got unionized.

Three papers agreed to start originally, and by the time we hit the streets several more had joined; the Baltimore *Sun*, the Buffalo *Courier-Express*, the Philadelphia *Record*, Chicago, the Newark *Star Ledger*, and the Boston paper. I know we had 19 papers at the peak. But they were major Sunday papers.

I think it should be mentioned that King Features tried to compete with the *Spirit* comic book section, and it collapsed. It's not very well known. It appeared at the same time, or within weeks after *The Spirit* came out. It had *Red Barry* by Will Gould. I don't know if he did it specifically for the supplement; they may have cut up the strip. It was 16 pages, the same physical format.

So we proceeded to move on . . . Lou Fine was doing a thing called *Uncle Sam* for the comic books, that I created. Chuck Mazoujian did the first *Lady Luck*. And then we had


COMIC BOOK SECTION
THE CHICAGO SUN
ACTION Mystery ADVENTURE
SUNDAY, AUGUST 16, 1942
The SPIRIT
by Will EISNER
That shadow, my likeness that goes to and fro seeking a livelihood, chattering, chaffering..
How often I find myself standing and looking at it where it flits...
How often I question and doubt whether that is really me...
Walt Whitman

some lettering done free lance.

Who was writing Lady Luck *before Claus Nordling?*

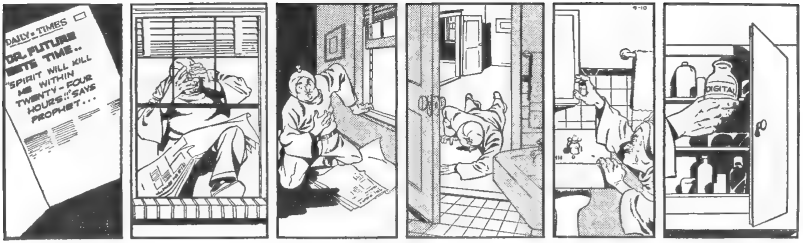
Chuck Mazoujian didn't write *Lady Luck*; he was not a writer. So I wrote them. When Nordling took over the art, he wrote his own. He's a great comic book writer.

So you wrote everything in the section before the war, except where Powell and Nordling wrote their own material?

That's right. I think occasionally we . . . there was a writer named Dick French who we would buy stories from every once in a while for *Lady Luck* and occasionally *Mr. Mystic*.

The shop was an apartment, and we all worked cheek and jowl. The living room was the studio, and the bedroom was my office; I sort of worked apart. And there was a lot of exchange back and forth, a lot of conversation during the day. The business side of this thing, of course, was in Busy Arnold's hands. Busy also had two or three other magazines of his own.

Now that we had sold the package, the theory was that I would develop three features. I told them pretty much what I wanted. One thing that worked in my advantage was that Busy Arnold, as I said, had tried it alone three or four months



earlier, and apparently couldn't produce anything that was of syndicate caliber. And I had something of a reputation by then. Both Busy and the people around him had enough respect for me at that time to let me run on my own. Arnold and Brenner had certain ideas, but there weren't any emotional problems there. I had pretty much the freedom . . . the business was young enough so almost any idea you came up with was fresh.

I said, "Look, let's have a magician type, a lady detective adventure, and *The Spirit.*" I think the only thing that Busy did lay on me, and I was very respectful of it as I recall, was that he was very anxious to stay within what he felt was acceptable and saleable. He didn't want to try anything wild and new. And looking back on it, it was probably the thing that made *The Spirit* unique, because I think that gave me a chance to develop a new concept within the frame of so-called acceptable patterns. We had a bit of a hassle while I was creating *The Spirit.* He and Martin wanted a costumed character. I didn't. The mask and gloves were the compromise.

But Busy was being responsive to newspaper editors. Selling a feature, even at that time, to newspaper syndicates is a very difficult thing, because the syndicate requires you to develop what is called the "common denominator" feature.

Comics at that time were regarded as pretty chintzy things, about two stages above pornography, really. Comic books, I mean. The comic strips were essentially regarded as entertainment, and looked down on too by the literary establishment, but as far as I was concerned the newspaper cartoonists were the upper aristocracy, and I didn't actually get to meet any of them until during the war when the Cartoonists Society got started and I was introduced to, breathlessly, Al Capp, who brought me into the Cartoonists Society. I was the one comic book artist that entered the Cartoonists Society then, because I was not quite a comic book artist. I was sort of half comic book and half newspaper.

Comics at that time represented an element in the newspaper which supplied something that wasn't present in the other media. The print medium had very little competition in the area of visuals. Comic strips supplied the situation comedy continuity which television later furnished. And they supplied reading for children on Sunday morning. That was a great tradition, to spread out the papers on the floor on Sunday morning; you don't hear much about that any more.

Milton Caniff was the absolute leader, the epitome of great comic art then. And the excitement of a Sunday paper appearing with Hal Foster's material was just great.

Didn't the syndicate expect more sophisticated material than had appeared in comic books?

The syndicate didn't expect anything; they didn't know what they were to expect. You must understand, and I think this is historically important, that *The Spirit* comic section existed because the newspapers were looking for a way of getting on to the bandwagon. And there I was lucky again. There were no rules. I was making my own rules. *I* realized that the newspapers had a diversified audience. *They* thought I was talking to children. In fact, one of the papers, I think it was the Boston *Globe,* ran one of their constant surveys. They ran the survey on very little kids for *The Spirit* section, because that's who they thought it was for, and they got a very bad response. And the people who really gave the best response were the older readers and the carriers. And they just couldn't understand it.

It was a boon to me, but it was also a strain on me, because I had no perimeters to work within. *The Spirit* style and sophistication that I was working toward largely came from my own recognition. Arnold's concern was only, don't make waves. Or, "Let's sell as many papers as we can." Henry Martin, one of the great syndicate salesmen, was a rather dignified gent who would make no other comment except that he was very pleased with the feature and he kept getting good responses. Occasionally they would take me out to see an editor of a newspaper and I would get feedback of some kind. But my basic guide was my own instinct, and the mail that came in. And I began to realize who I was writing for.

It was one of those unique fortuitous circumstances, because I suddenly found an opportunity to do what I had really always wanted to do, which was to write "seriously," or write good material and at the same time stay within the medium I knew and had developed skills for.

The Spirit slowly evolved, and whenever I tried something it was not so much in defiance of anybody, but rather there was a hole and I would fill it. Arnold was really the only one that attempted to influence me and that wasn't very much. Busy was primarily a printing salesman who had gotten into this business, and his standards were based purely on what he thought was a successful formula. I read recently that he said that "Will was a great idea man, but he wasn't good on story." Busy's idea of story was, of course, a good solid, standard comic book story. He would call me up and say, "Why don't we hire a good radio writer? You get up the ideas, but let a great radio writer write the stories."

As a matter of fact, during the war I had Bill Woolfolk and Manly Wade Wellman, and another fellow who wound up swiping *Spirit* stories from Ellery Queen. They sued us, and we had to sue him, and he finally admitted under cross-examination that, yes, he might have been influenced by those stories. There were three or four stories. I was in the Army then, and wasn't even doing *The Spirit,* but they sent me stories to review while I was in the Pentagon Building. But there was very little I could do other than read through them. I never was particularly an Ellery Queen fan, but I noticed one of them had a familiar ring to it, and I called Busy and asked, "Are you sure of this?" "Oh," he says, "he's a crack pulp writer, a radio writer. Gee, you can't make comments like that." I said, "You'd better check on it." And sure as hell, in about a month . . .

But Busy and I got along pretty well. Until later on, and then of course on the business side we had problems. I recall

he started a real fight between me and Bob Powell because he talked Powell into coming into his comic books. Remember, he had two enterprises; he was a partner in mine, and he had his own. And when his books were not doing well he started looking at the talent in my shop. And I told Busy, "You absolutely can't have Bob Powell." And Bob came to me and said, "Busy offered me ten dollars more than you're paying, and you have a lot of nerve keeping me from going forward," and so forth. We finally resolved it . . . Bob went to work for Busy.

I really wanted to devote myself fully and wholly to *The Spirit* and the four magazines that I was doing. I was working day and night. I was a bachelor at the time and I was not much of a socialite, so I was able to devote myself fully to it. It was a very engrossing activity, and very-exciting because I was aware that I was on to something. I knew I was producing something of which there was only one in the entire country. There was a very heady kind of excitement.

The syndicate felt that a lot of papers wouldn't take on the Sunday unless there was a daily with it, so I started *The Spirit* daily a little over a year after the Sundays began, on October 13, 1941. I had never really done a daily strip outside of high school. But by then, of course, I was feeling my oats and trying for new ideas.

It was not an instant success. But daily strips rarely were; they needed years to catch on. In some cases it took ten years for one to really reach its peak, particularly a continuity strip. It's a little different today. Well, the newspapers wanted *The Spirit* to be daily what it was on Sunday, but they didn't fully understand that what I was doing on Sunday was a complete story with a character all its own. And I guess *I* got trapped in the desire to make it daily because a daily strip was a symbol of success for a cartoonist. At that moment, however, I was drafted.

Jack Cole took it over, both art and later writing, when I went into the Army. I didn't work very long on the daily, but I'm amazed in looking at the recent reprints at the number of dailies I can recognize as ones that I did. It was dropped because of space limitations due to the war, I think. It probably would have continued on, as bad or as unpopular as it was, in any other normal time. So chalk it up as a failure.

The war experience was a very rewarding time for me. I was drafted into the Army early in 1942, and got involved after basic training on the camp newspaper, as a cartoonist. Then I went on to Washington, to the Office of the Chief of Ordnance, and became involved in the development of training materials for the military. I became editor of a magazine called *Fire Power*, which was a military "trade journal," in quotes, published by the Department of Defense, by the Ordnance Corps, the Ordnance Department then. It was also partially funded by the American Ordnance Association, which was sort of a quasi-government thing.

I was a warrant officer. Part of my job was public relations, and part was also getting involved in a unique publication called *Army Motors*, which was the first of its kind in the history of the military. And this, again, captured my

THE PRESS

Yokum Gold

For weeks, nearly everyone in the syndicate business knew Al Capp, creator of "Li'l Abner," and United Feature Syndicate, Inc., had been feuding. The issue was money. Capp's hillbilly strip, one of the topnotchers of the trade, goes to more than 600 dailies in America alone and brings the artist a reputed $75,000 to $100,000 yearly.

But Capp thinks that's not enough. Last week, he said so publicly in a suit filed against his syndicate in a New York Federal District Court. The gist of his charges: United Feature doesn't promote "Li'l Abner" enough, doesn't get enough money for it, uses it as a tie-in sale with service of the United Press (parent of UFS) and with UFS columns and other features, and keeps down its customer list by granting papers exclusive rights in too broad areas.

For such alleged breaches of contract, Capp wants $14,000,000 in damages; his contract, which has seven years to run, torn up; and a return of all rights in "Li'l Abner" to its creator.

United Feature officials were not available for comment.

The waggish and cocky Capp's fight with UFS served as fodder for a take-off like those with which Capp himself has made millions of his fans laugh. It came from the pen of Will Eisner, whose "The Spirit" goes via the Des Moines Register and Tribune Syndicate to about a half dozen big papers with newsprint enough to handle an eight-page, Sunday-only thriller.

In his strip timed for release on Sunday, July 20, Eisner poked fun especially at "Fearless Fosdick," a Capp burlesque of Chester Gould's "Dick Tracy." Eisner's plot makes Al Slapp, creator of "Li'l Adam," the stupid hillbilly boy, the victim of an attempted murder. Suspicion points to two cartoonists: Hector Ghoul, creator of "Nick Stacy," whose strip has been wrecked by Slapp's "Fearful Fooznick," and Elmer Hay, creator of "Little Homeless Brenda," who looks like Daddy Warbucks of "Orphan Annie," fame Ghoul is about to be arrested when "The Spirit" solves the crime. Slapp's assassin turns out to be Matrix, his syndicate boss. The motive: Slapp threatened to switch to Richard Headline Smirch's syndicate.

GHOUL... A BIG TIME SYNDICATED CARTOONIST LIVING IN SUCH A DIVE? YOU MUST BE PENNILESS..
I AM..SINCE AL SLAPP BEGAN LAMPOONING MY NICK STACY WITH HIS FEARFUL FOOZNICK MY FOLLOWING HAS SHRUNK..
HE FINALLY RELENTED AND AGREED TO NEEDLE HOMELESS BRENDA.
As drawn by Will Eisner

A fellow artist parodies Al Capp's parody of Chester Gould's "Dick Tracy"

Capp by Al Capp

JOE DOPE — **Higher Mathematics** — **By WILL EISNER**

WE'VE GOT A COUPLE OF VEHICLES DEADLINED AND OUR OUTFIT'S ON ITS WAY TO THE FRONT. I WAS SENT DOWN TO SEE IF YOU HAVE ANY EXTRA PARTS!
COMPANY SUPPLY ROOM
NO!!
PLEASE... JOE... PLEASE.. WE NEED 2 GENERATORS! HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE?
A EVEN DOZEN!
PRODUCED UNDER SPECIAL LICENSE TO U.S. DEPT. DEFENSE
COPR. 1951 WILL EISNER PRODUCTIONS
THAT'S GREAT...WITH YOUR TOO... YOU ONLY NEED HALF THAT... SO HOW ABOUT TRADING ME 2 FOR THESE TWO OLD ONES?
NOPE!
WHY? WHY??
CAUSE IF I LEND YOU 2 THEN I WON'T HAVE AN EVEN DOZEN!
WILL EISNER

JOE DOPE — **They'll Do It At The Port** — **By WILL EISNER**

HEY JOE... WE'RE SHIPPIN' OUT TOMORROW, GIT ON THE BALL AND READY-UP YR 'JEEP'
NOT FORGETING OF COURSE TO PROPERLY CRATE FOR SAFETY AROUND THE WINDSHIELD!
FRAGILE
SACH TIME
CARE
AAAH...THEY'LL DO IT AT THE PORT!
...AT THE PORT
AAAH..THEY'RE SUPPOSED TO CRATE IT AT THE PORT... IT'S A 2nd ECHELON JOB!
CRASH
...ABOARD SHIP
AAAH...THEY SHOULDA BOXED IT AT THE PORT!
DESTINATION...
YOUR MOTOR POOL REPLACEMENTS SUX!
@!*!#@#&!! WHAT'S THAT 'OOCKA' THE WAY THEY HANDLED MY NEW JEEP...I'LL WRITE TO ME SENATOR I'LL PROTEST!
PRODUCED UNDER SPECIAL LICENSE TO U.S. DEPT. DEFENSE
COPR. 1951 WILL EISNER PRODUCTIONS
WILL EISNER

JOE DOPE — **That's That** — **By WILL EISNER**

WELL SIR, HE STARTED OUT ATOP THIS HILL, AND SEEING HOW STEEP IT WAS HE SLAMMED ON THE BRAKES!
THAT'S GOOD!
BUT...HE KEPT RIDING THE BRAKE.. AS MOST GUYS DO..
THAT'S BAD!
PRODUCED UNDER SPECIAL LICENSE TO U.S. DEPT. DEFENSE
COPR. 1951 WILL EISNER PRODUCTIONS
NOT REALIZING THAT THE BRAKE DRUM WAS GETTING HOT, EXPANDING AND THUS LOSING IT'S GRIP!
THAT'S RIGHT!
BY THE TIME HE WAS HALF WAY DOWN HE WAS RIDING WITH NO BRAKE AT ALL!
THAT'S ALL!
WILL EISNER

JOE DOPE — **What's Goose For The Gander** — **By WILL EISNER**

YEOW!
17
WILL EISNER
HAW HAW HAW!
LEMME INSIDE QUICK...THAT JOE DOPE IS LOOSE WITH A AIR HOSE AGAIN..
OH, OH HE'S ONE OF THEM COMEDIANS
PRODUCED UNDER SPECIAL LICENSE TO U.S. DEPT. DEFENSE
COPR. 1951 WILL EISNER PRODUCTIONS
HE'S GASP!
YEOW!
HEE HEE...I BEEN THINKIN' JOE BET A GUY COULD HAVE A LOTTA FUN AROUND THE POOL WITH A AIR HOSE. EH???

excitement because I always like to be involved in something new. It was written in GI language with cartoons, teaching them maintenance procedures on equipment. The Ordnance Department had a new mission, to get involved in trucks and other vehicles. And they developed the concept "preventive maintenance," borrowed partially from the British.

And I created a character called Joe Dope for a poster series. And then I ultimately did a *Joe Dope* daily format on the same concept as *Miss Lace* that went out to Army papers all over the world, and the idea of it was, again, to teach preventive maintenance. It wasn't morale building the way *Miss Lace* was. That was late '42, '43. By then I had developed a series of characters for *Army Motors*; Half-Mast, Connie Rod. The ideas for those characters initially came from two civilians who were producing a mimeographed little bulletin. We decided to develop that into something substantial and it became a whole project in itself.

Those characters are in PS *magazine. Did they continue all through the forties?*

In '46 *Army Motors* ended. It wasn't being published at all until in 1950, when the Korean War started, I went down to Washington and sold them on the idea of reactivating it.

Before we go on to that, could you discuss the postwar years of The Spirit.

Those were the vintage years.

Would it be correct to say that you had a larger staff than the first two years?

Let me talk about that because I think a couple of people should get important credit in there. Of course, one of them was Jules Feiffer. Jules had a unique impact on *The Spirit.* I remember one rainy windswept afternoon in my office, which was at 37 Wall Street (as a matter of fact it was the very building at the foot of which I had sold newspapers many, many years before). A kid walked in the shop and said his name was Feiffer, and he'd like to work for me. And I said, "What can you do?" And he said, "I'll do anything. I'll do coloring, or clean-up, or anything, and I'd like to work for nothing." And I said, "Gee, I'd like to have you," because I have a reputation for being a very careful man with a buck, but I said, "I know there's a law that prevents it. So rather than risk the law, I'll pay you something."

So Jules started at something like ten, 15, 20 dollars a week, some really ridiculous amount, and he worked as a clean-up, paste-up, background man. He couldn't letter. He wasn't a very good draftsman as an artist, but he made up for it in his intensity. He was a great man to have in the shop because almost instantly we had a good strong interaction. I could talk stories out with him. His job in the shop was really working on everything. And I would say '48, '49 and early '50, just before his going into the Army for the Korean War, Jules was actually writing stories. It was mixed up. He would do some stories. Or we would do it together.

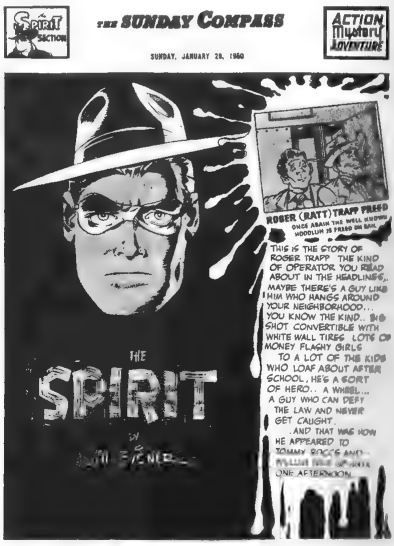
When did he start?

It had to be late '46, early '47, because I moved then over to West Street, and I recall my secretary was Marilyn Mercer, who's now editor of one of the large magazines.

Then Jules wanted to do a feature of his own and I gave him a thing called *Clifford.* That was a great feature; it deserves to be republished. I think it really deserves to be recognized as the forerunner of *Peanuts.* Whether Charlie Schultz was influenced by Feiffer or not, I don't know, but Feiffer was there with the *Peanuts* concept before *Peanuts* got started. I don't know whether he'd claim it, but *I* credit him with it.

To the left, an unused splash page for 1/29/50. To the right is the published version.

RATT GUTT
...A LOT OF KIDS ENVY HIM ...YOU KNOW... SORT OF ADMIRE THE WAY HE PUSHES FOLKS AROUND...
WELL... HERE'S A CLOSE-UP PICTURE OF JUST SUCH A GUY..


SPIRIT SECTION
THE SUNDAY COMPASS
SUNDAY, JANUARY 29, 1950
ACTION Mystery ADVENTURE
THE SPIRIT
ROGER (RATT) TRAPP FREED
THIS IS THE STORY OF ROGER TRAPP THE KIND OF OPERATOR YOU READ ABOUT IN THE HEADLINES.. MAYBE THERE'S A GUY LIKE HIM WHO HANGS AROUND YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD... YOU KNOW THE KIND.. BIG SHOT CONVERTIBLE WITH WHITE WALL TIRES LOTS OF MONEY FLASHY GIRLS TO A LOT OF THE KIDS WHO LOAF ABOUT AFTER SCHOOL, HE'S A SORT OF HERO.. A WHEEL... A GUY WHO CAN DEFY THE LAW AND NEVER GET CAUGHT.
..AND THAT WAS HOW HE APPEARED TO TOMMY ROCCO AND

Then there was John Spranger who came in after the War and did a number of *Spirits* in late '46 and early '47. He would ink my pencils or he would do the penciling and I would ink. Then there was Jerry Grandenetti. I found him through an ad in the paper because he had been working for an architectural firm, doing renderings. And I figured that's what I needed badly. And I had a fellow named Abe Kanigsen, who was one of the great letterers of all time. I credit Abe for an awful lot of what was turned out in *The Spirit*. And he was also a good editor. He had good judgment. He also played a very fine guitar. He and Jules were very friendly.

There was also Andre Le Blanc. He did *Intellectual Amos* in *The Spirit* section, and he helped me on a couple of *Spirit* stories. One of his was "Cromlech, the Nature Boy" [7/4/48]. He was very good at that kind of thing. Then there was Wally Wood at the end, and I think somebody else came in that I've forgotten.

A couple of stories were also written by Klaus Nordling. In fact just the other day I discovered two or three uninked roughed out stories by Nordling. But other than that, no one ever did any writing on *The Spirit* except Feiffer. He was the only one I would trust to do a *Spirit* story. We would talk a story out from a basic idea of mine. Then Jules or I would write it. I would lay out or rough out at the very least. There was no formula . . . but, for sure, no *Spirit* story ever went out without my hand in it.

It was a very happy shop. I had dreams at one time of being able to put a team together and so weld the styles that we would have one unified, almost Disney kind of thing. In that way I hoped I wouldn't be trapped into having to do it all the time myself. It never quite worked out because as a staffer became more skilled he went off and developed his own . . . wanted to have his own identity, his own feature. Understandably.

What was your method of operation in those years?

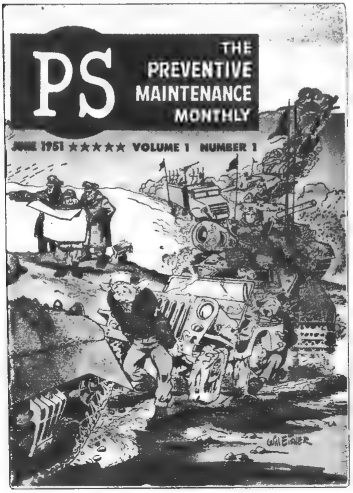
Generally on Monday morning I'd come in with a rough idea, sometimes with the first page pretty well roughed out. I'd spend Monday breaking down or laying out the story. Maybe I would go all the way to Wednesday in writing it, but the first three pages would be ready for lettering. I'd rough the story out, balloons in position all the way to the end. Or Feiffer would lay in balloons and do stick figures after we'd talked out a story. That was in the beginning; then gradually he could write his own.

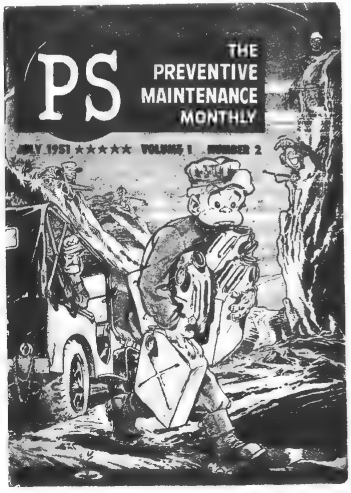
He was very responsive. He had, still does to this day have, an uncanny ear for dialogue. Aside from whatever genius he is well known for—and he is a genius. His philosophy was a little different than mine, in the sense that my concern for interlarded, interwoven plots was greater than his. But we both had something very much in common, which probably comes from a common heritage, which was an obsession with the little man, the man who is sort of overwhelmed by . . . I think Feiffer was probably more paranoid than I, but then I was more mature than he at that point.

Well, then I'd have the balloons inked. Then I'd go back over them and draw, or compose the panels . . . rough draw in the figures over the stick figures. Sometimes the art work was parcelled out in the case of a crisis, so that if Grandenetti was there he'd take a whack at inking some of them. Or if somebody else penciled for me after I did a lot of rough figure work, then I would ink over it.

I might have somebody pencil and I would ink, or I would pencil and they would ink. It would depend on how much pressure we were under. But one or the other was done by me. It was never both pencil and inking by somebody else. That way I could keep control of the feature, keep my "mark" on it. I was pretty good at inking without much penciling, so I could really compensate a great deal. I found that to be the most rewarding, rather than penciling, because at the inking stage I could always change a man's figure or position.

I know in the case of one story that John Spranger penciled, a thing called "The Bucket o' Blood" [6/16/46] which Warren reprinted, I went over a great deal of Spranger's penciling. But a lot of his bulky, full-bodied style still





remained. The difference between him and me was that I had a rubbery kind of quality, and his figures were fully solid-packed. They were made of concrete. I had to soften them up. In fact, I redrew a couple of them for that reprint because I just couldn't stand it.

But that was my week. Now of course in between I handled some business affairs, did other publishing, made a trip here and there. It was a very heavy grind. I was really working an enormous schedule; I worked very hard. But I enjoyed it.

Right after the War I began developing the use of comics for industrial training, employee relations material. I started a company called American Visuals, and I sold General Motors a comic book. I sold a whole bunch of comics at that time in what was called special purpose or commercial comics . . . The American Medical Association, The American Dental Association. Klaus Nordling worked on some of those; "Daredevil Davey," about the care of teeth, things of that kind.

I did a comic on self-examination for breast cancer, which never was published. Then with the U.N. I developed some things that were sent out to Pakistan to teach anti-soil erosion practices. That also never actually got published. But a lot of them never saw large circulation; they were all specialized. We did things for the American Trucking Association, automotive training material.

I became very active in publishing other kinds of literature, all visually oriented, but all employing the comic strip concept or the comic strip technique. I had come to the exciting realization that comics are a teaching tool.

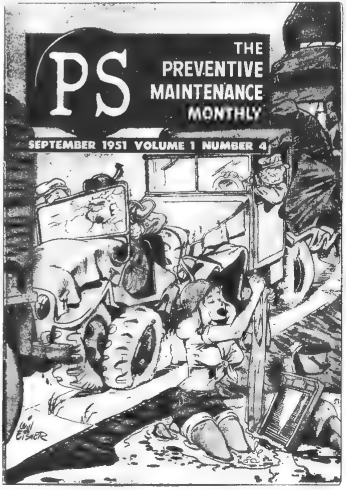
Then in 1950, as I said, I sold the Army on the idea of reactivating an *Army Motors* type of magazine. This time I offered to do it as a civilian contractor. And it had fertile grounds because the same people who had run *Army Motors* were down in the Army, still running the Ordnance Department. At that time I had a salesman, and it was easy for me to send him down to sound them out.

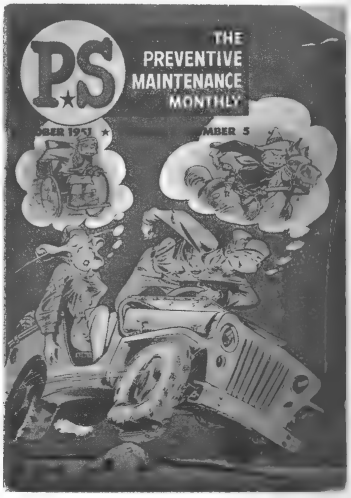
And they said, "Yes." I prepared a complete first issue prototype of *PS* magazine, which was then tested very seriously in Army posts. It took about six months of testing, matched against the regular training literature. And then I got the contract. It was my idea; I initiated the reactivation, but the selection of me was theirs, of course.

By this time *The Spirit* began to become very burdensome, because I was doing hundreds of other things. And it looked like *PS* was going to be a full monthly publication; originally it started as twice a year. I'd just gotten married, and a lot of things were happening.

And the whole Sunday newspaper market was beginning to soften. So I had to make a decision. I could have continued *The Spirit*, I suppose, and I thought about it very seriously, but I finally decided I would close the show while it was ahead. And finally in mid '52 I sent a notice around to all the papers, and we still had quite a few papers, that I was ceasing production of *The Spirit*. We had already cut it to a four-pager in an effort to make it easier. But it just didn't work. I figured rather than twist the thing into any kind of weird shape . . . I don't know. I don't regret it. I think it was a wise decision when I look back at it. Sooner or later the whole distribution, which all creators are enslaved to, would have collapsed anyhow.

PS grew, and I began doing a lot of material for use in translations of technical manuals, for the "client" countries that were receiving foreign aid. I used comics as a way of transcending language barriers. Because the military in this country was passing on lend lease equipment. For example in the Korean War, the Koreans were getting out equipment with our technical manuals, which they had to translate. And they found it almost impossible to translate them into low level Korean. So I developed the comic strip there again as a teaching tool. Very successfully. Unfortunately, not as widely used as I would have liked it to be, but nonetheless very successfully. This continued on until the Vietnamese War. I went to Viet Nam. I've been in Turkey, reducing technical manuals into comic form. It developed into a whole science. And it's still at the threshold of its full use.





PS had a staff of eight people including three technical illustrators. Dan Zolne worked with me, used to be Zolnerowich, who started on *Jumbo* with me and did a lot of early comics. I got him back and he stayed with me then as a technical illustrator, really. He preferred to do technical illustrations. He also did some straight illustrations. Then a fellow named Charlie Kramer came in and he had a style somewhat like mine, and he had a great technical expertise. Later on I had Murphey Anderson for a while, and then recently Mike Ploog worked for a couple of years.

Who decided what technical subjects were to be handled?

The Army did that. They built a 24 man staff on top of ours, real fine. They would have reporters, technical experts visiting troop units around the world. And they'd find out what information was needed. Once a month they'd send us a whole bunch of photographs and articles in mimeographed form written by the engineers. And we would take it and reduce it to visuals. So it was their evaluation and technical judgment, and some of their language, although a lot of it was ours.

And we would then return to them a total package, like the old days of the comic books. I did a strip called *Joe Dope*, which revolved around Half-Mast and Connie Rod. I did the cover and I illustrated the book itself.

How much of the translation into comic form did you do?

Well, a lot of the translation was mine, about ninety percent. After a while I had people who could illustrate as well as I, so all I had to do was rough up. Technical illustrations I never did.

In 1952 I got very involved in developing material for the then-burgeoning industrial relations market, the reading rack market. Industrial companies were putting little racks in their plants for their employees, and I got heavily into that business. We also produced a comic book called *Hoods Up* for Fram Oil Filters that went into service stations.

In those years my activity was devoted largely to designing the material, selling business, developing concepts, marketing —at the same time doing a certain amount of creative work.

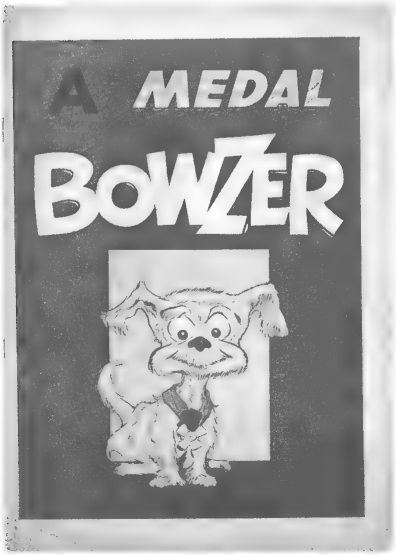
Then we became very well connected with General Motors. I think I sold them the first comic book they ever bought for their employees. It was on productivity, during their union negotiations.

Then in 1958 or 9 we merged with a firm called Koster-Dana, which was the largest reading rack company then in the business. We had been coming up very fast behind them, and most of the other companies had fallen away. So we decided that the two of us should merge. They had no creative force, they just had sales organization. We were *all* creative. And I became president of that company. This was a publicly held company that had major industrial people like Charlie Wilson (General Electric) on the board of directors.

With the combined assets, the company then bought Bell-McClure Syndicate. And I became head of that. And we ran that for a while; it was having trouble and we turned it around a little bit. Then in 1961, '62, I withdrew from that company. I bought out American Visuals and a couple of other small properties from the company. Sold some of my stock there, but still held a substantial interest in the company.

I pulled out largely because the company was heading in

These comics, produced by American Visuals, were presumably for the American Medical Association. They are undated, but appear to be from the late '40s. The eight page Bowser *champions the cause of vivisection; the 16 page* Willie *warns of the dangers of socialized medicine.*



another direction. One of the divisions that we had acquired developed a hydraulic jack of some kind. All the money was being poured into that and the publishing end of the business was beginning to atrophy. I didn't know how to run a hydraulics company, and it was a very simple decision.

At the same time I had developed with the Department of Labor a very interesting idea. It took me two or three years to convince them, but finally they agreed to try the use of comics for disadvantaged youths. I created a series called *Job Scene.* So around 1965 we got a research and development contract from the Department of Labor. It's been very, very successful, and to this date I think we've sold some five million copies.

In 1967 I began to publish for school, lower elementary grades, a thing called "World Explorer Program," which was a multi-media kit of enrichment materials for social studies. It

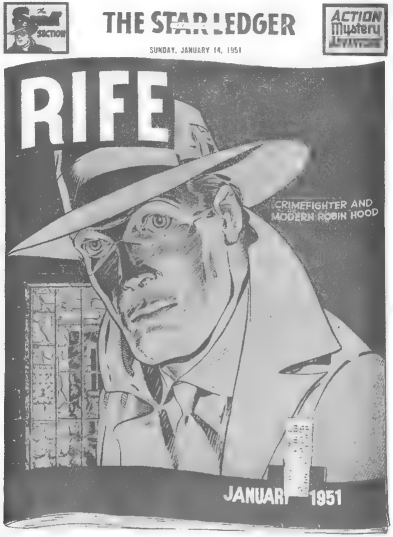
Philadelphia, August 31, 1947
FUN BOOK—The Spirit
THE SPIRIT
ACTION Mystery ADVENTURE
CAN YOU SEE ANYTHING?
...TRY TO READ THIS CHART... TRY! TRY HARD...
ALL RIGHT PUT THE BANDAGES BACK ON!
By Will Eisner
SPIRIT
HE'S BLINDED, SEVERS HIS TEMPORAL... I THINK, DOLAN, YOU HAD BETTER TELL ME HOW IT HAPPENED!
ABOUT A WEEK AGO, IN A FIGHT WITH THE OCTOPUS, HE GOT TOO CLOSE TO A GUN FLASH...

contained a record, a booklet, a map, and other little elements that formed a very interesting package to kids. That grew so rapidly within three years that it involved me almost fully. By 1969 and '70 I really spent very little of my time on *PS*, and finally I decided that we would let it go.

I set up a separate company for the people who were on the staff and let them bid for the contract, and I would be sort of an advisor. And they lost the contract because they over-bid. Chuck Kramer, who had left me five years before, went after the contract with Dan Zolne. They were awarded the contract, but I heard they lost it again after having lost a lot of money on it. So from 1971 on I had nothing to do with *PS* magazine any longer. Murphy Anderson now produces it.

In early '71 we merged Educational Supplements, which was the company that was doing all this educational material, with Croft Educational in New London. And I became board chairman there. However, by October of '72 I elected to sell my equity in the company. I resigned from the board of directors and decided to get more heavily involved in this new wave in publishing.

Part of the decision was business reasons, but another major reason really was the fact that I suddenly realized how old I was, and *The Spirit* was enjoying a resurgence. It was like an old girlfriend showing up after you've been married 25 years. I suddenly started fiddling around with *The Spirit*. I began to



find myself getting the old originals back out of the vault. And people were asking about it. I attended a convention, and to my amazement there were a lot of people there who thought the feature was good.

Meanwhile *Job Scene* was still very active, and I had bought that little property out of the company. Then I formed a little company called Poorhouse Press and turned out some new satirical stuff. And I intend now, hopefully, to spend the rest of my life producing "comic literature."

One other thing; I was also invited to teach a class at the School of Visual Arts, which is the first time I've ever had an opportunity to do that. And that was a very exciting thing . . .

The above was recorded on December 27 and 31, 1973. Since then The Spirit *has continued to enjoy a resurgence of popularity, with a regular magazine published first by Warren and currently by Kitchen Sink Enterprises, and a new portfolio of paintings by Eisner. Eisner has recently published his "graphic novel,"* A Contract with God, *which, he says, "I hope will be the forerunner of the treatment of more substantial and significant themes in the medium of comics . . . or sequential art." One can be sure that Eisner himself will continue to explore new and exciting avenues in the field.*

JULES FEIFFER TALKS ABOUT THE SPIRIT

Eisner seems to think his golden period was after he got out of the Army. But I think the best days of *The Spirit* were from about six months after he began it until he got drafted and gave it over to Lou Fine. I mean, obviously the strip was drawn better later on, and was probably better looking in a lot of ways, but I don't think that matters. It really has to do, I think, with the intensity of vision, and concentration, and love of what you're doing. Simply as a piece of art, as something out of a man's mind that was total and whole and absolutely right, I don't think it ever got better than those pre-war years. Not that it didn't come back later in different weeks, and not that there weren't certain brilliant episodes later.

But everything that came later, after he got out of the Army, was not so much carrying on, it seems to me, but in many ways a kind of attempt to *recreate* a mood that was no longer right for him, that he no longer felt. It was reinventing something out of his past. And I think he knew this; because he didn't take the strip that seriously. I didn't know him until '46, so I can't talk about him before then. But certainly from the time I got to know him, he saw himself less as an artist and more as a businessman. And talked very openly about that.

I mean, those of us who were his students—and most of us who went to work for him were, in a sense, students of his—all went to work for him not because it was a job, but because it was *Eisner*. And so we took virtually no money, just to be working with him; it was an apprentice situation. And we found out that at that time we had more respect for the master and his work than the master had for himself in terms of his work. I don't think he'd deny that now. Maybe he would, but I think he's probably straight enough about it to acknowledge that.

In that article in *Changes* I forget what he points out as one of his-favorite stories, but it surprised me. Oh no, it doesn't surprise me because actually it *was* a throw-back to the old stuff. It was about the man who could fly [9/5/48]. And that to me was pure Eisner. That was marvelous.

What do you feel about the stories that had that Warner Brothers, New York tenement, small-time hood feel?

That's a little hard for me to comment on, because some of those I wrote. Can you talk specifically?

Did you write the story of the neighborhood kid that robs the candy store and kills the owner [9/11/49]?

Yes, that was mine. That was simply an autobiographical fantasy based on my Bronx upbringing. And the fat candy store man was based on a candy store man that I remembered from my childhood. I thought of that when I wrote it as a combination of Eisner and old time *Suspense* radio dramas. I don't know if you remember *Suspense*, but it was a program that affected me an awful lot. And taught me a lot about writing, and particularly about a sense of time in writing. And the little clocks running through that story were specifically based on a *Suspense* program. They did a famous old English story by Harvey, I think it was, called "August Heat," with Ronald Colman, in which you're taken through a half hour of time in a half an hour. And that fascinated me. Then I thought, what about going through seven pages of time? The time sequence would be exactly that.

That story was a kind of combining the Eisner lower class feeling, the dismalness . . . as I talked about in *Comic Book Heroes*, the Fritz Lang shabbiness, that German expressionist sense of what life is really like, the underside of it, with techniques that I picked up from William Spier when he was directing and producing *Suspense*.

That's the one where the kid gets killed when the subway bangs him against the pillar. Eisner put in that last scene. I forget how I had ended it. He stuck in the subway, with the kid being caught in the door, being dragged along, because I think he felt very little action was taking place. The Spirit, I think, comes in only on the last page or page and a half back.

Isn't there a kid playing ball also in that? I also used that in *Clifford*. [*He looks over the story.*] "What is this, a joke 'r sumpin?" That wouldn't be mine, " 'r sumpin." I might have said, "Don't touch that," but I certainly wouldn't have said, "You bummer." That's Eisner's line. I might have said, "You bum." "One of the neighborhood boys," that's mine. "R, my name is Renee." "How did it all happen?? I never did nothin'." That's all mine.

One thing that impressed me was this panel where the kid is being chased, and he's thinking, "What a crazy thing . . . what a crazy thing . . ." He's allowed this moment of introspection where he's realizing, "How did I get into this?"

But that's out of a tradition also, which I was conversant with, the stories of Cornell Woolrich and James M. Cain. Where you take an ordinary guy and he says, "Honey, I can't sleep. I think I'll go downstairs and pick up tomorrow morning's *Daily News*." And she never sees him again. Woolrich just took people in very ordinary circumstances and entered them into violence, which is something that Eisner also did from the beginning. And it fascinated me when I read it in Eisner, it fascinated me when I read it in pulps when I was a kid, and listened to *Suspense*, which used to dramatize a lot of them.

And I suppose what so interested me in that kind of approach was that I was living that sort of life in the East Bronx: painfully dull and painfully dismal, and painfully poor. Lower middle class; not poverty, but poor in spirit, certainly. And that one could take off from that vantage point and enter into all sorts of danger which was fascinating . . . so that you didn't have to be Superman, you could be anyone and suddenly enter a world which was out of control. As in fact one felt his own life privately was, but there was no proof of it.

Another story that I was thinking of was the one about the barbershop [10/22/50].

There's a guy who's talking through a haircut all the way through? I wrote that one. That's a direct swipe of Ring Lardner, who wrote a marvelous story called "Haircut," which is told in the first person by the barber or the guy who's talking to the barber, and I forget what the point of the story is, but if you look it up the source is quite evident. In *The Spirit* story he's in the death house. I don't know where he is in the Lardner story. I hope he's not in the death house; that would hurt me. I hesitate to look it up because I would not like to think I was that blatant.

And again, I suppose what I loved in Lardner, who I came to after knowing Eisner's work . . . I mean, Eisner taught me the strength of . . . Eisner was the first that I ever knew, because when I began reading him, well, long before *The Spirit*, but I began reading him in his best literary form in 1940 when he began *The Spirit*. Some kid whose father worked in a printing plant brought home the *Newark Star Ledger*. And I was astonished with the use of the narrative, with the guy who just walks on in front of the lead page, and starts telling a story. I didn't know that this was possible. It absolutely boggled my mind, excited me terribly. And hell, you know, it's my method today in my strip. I got it from Eisner and I'm still using it. Never give up a good thing.

There's a great consistency in The Spirit. *It's amazing that when a character would reappear in the series, his last appearance would be accurately referenced, like, "I haven't seen you since August 1946."*

It's not that amazing. I mean, you can easily go through the files and look it up. I was a walking encyclopedia of *The Spirit*. It was no problem with me. I didn't have the facts in my head, but I had a sense of where the facts could be gotten. For example, in doing *The Great Comic Book Heroes* I had an image

memory of what I wanted to reprint and generally what year it was. So when I went to National Comics to do research on the book, just on the basis of guesswork I asked for a particular year, and to cover myself asked for the next two years. And invariably I picked out what I wanted within the first five minutes; exactly what I remembered. It had nothing to do with research, it was just memory, and my memory was absolutely right every time. It turns out that my only real experience when I was a kid was comics. Everything else had been a put-on. A little depressing when you're 45 years old [*laughs*].

Was the story of the little boy's school composition of the trip to the zoo yours [4/23/50]?

Yes. That's one of my favorites. [*He looks over the story.*] See, he crosses out "children" and puts "class." I remembered that when I was a kid and got up in front of the class and referred to them as children they all got very upset. Because they didn't want to be talked to as children; they thought they were boys and girls. "I had a chopped liver and bacon sandwich." [*Laughs heartily.*] I didn't know chopped liver was Jewish in 1950, I guess. Look at this pure Eisner layout [*pages 4 and 5*]. "I am the second fastest runner in PS 77;" that's the school I went to in the Bronx. There's The Spirit's [*one panel*] involvement in this adventure [*laughs*].

And the lion starts to cross. This is Eisner. I knew the kid couldn't pick up that damn pole with the lion on it. I would never have done that. I think what probably happened is that I had the lion simply tripping and falling [*laughs heartily*]. And Eisner said, "You can't have a lion trip and fall!" So he has the kid picking the pole up. I love that story.

See, the way it would work, if you want to get into that . . . As I recall, that layout page kind of thing that you showed me was only done when I was no longer in the office, when I was in the Army. I also think it was done in the very beginning when I was trying to prove that I could write *The Spirit*. But once I was assigned as a writer, it seems to me that I might write it in this form for myself, but I don't think Eisner would see it. Then I would take the actual pages, and write it on the pages and break it down into panels and do a kind of half-assed layout, you know, very lightly sketch it in enough for Eisner to know exactly what's going on.

Then he would go over it, edit it, and rewrite it where he felt it needed rewriting, or call me in. I think it was rather informal. I think what would happen would be that at times he would, without consulting me, do small rewriting or massive rewriting. Other times he'd call me in and say, "Well, I don't know, try this or try that." And other times it was a combination of both. It was very rare that he wouldn't do something to it.

But the layout was part of your script.

I would do a rough pencil drawing of a page the way I thought it should look. But whether it was followed or not was up to Eisner. Sometimes he did and other times he improvised on it and other times he changed it entirely.

Did he sometimes give you plot ideas to flesh out into a story?

I remember less of that, but I'm sure it's the sort of thing that might have happened. It seems to me that he was more likely to do that with Marylin Mercer, who had written some stories for him before me. She would type them out in that traditional comic book style of narrative, you know, on those yellow pages. I never typed a script. I know sometimes she would do little Thurberesque doodles. She would take the original page and do little very cute drawings about what she thought should happen.

It should be clear, and I'm sure it is, that even when I wrote a *Spirit* story, and even when Eisner had nothing to do with them, they were still essentially his, in that, if I had invented a strip, it would have been another strip and, you know, I wouldn't have dared . . . There's a difference between a ghost and a creator. That has to be understood. Some of them that I wrote, particularly the ones that were less violent and more human interest, were based on my own conceptions, which were drawn out of radio, more or less. But others were pure Eisner, and I was simply acting as Eisner's head, doing them as I knew Eisner would do them, or would have done them at an earlier time. Because, as I told him when I started writing, I felt that I had more of a key to what the strip once was and to the excitement that turned me on about it than he, who was into lots of other things at that particular time, and no longer had that interest. But he taught me how to write stories so I understood the style; I mean, it was just a nuts and bolts thing. So, some of them I think of as mine and others I think of as really his even though I did them.

When did you start working for Eisner?

I started several times. I started originally sometime in '46, I think in the spring. And I was working for him for ten bucks a week, and ruled borders and did blacks. I also did the "Will Eisners"; I did the signatures on a lot of them. And then he lost some papers and fired everybody, and kept me on a couple of weeks, then fired me, and brought me back, and I went to Pratt for a year, so I guess it was the spring of '48 that I went back to him to work on some comic books. I wrote and laid out "Rube Rooky" in *Baseball Comics* and did all the research on it. That was entirely mine. And Tex Blaisdell drew it.

Was Blaisdell working on backgrounds for The Spirit*?*

Not particularly. Occasionally, but hardly at all. Those Rube Rooky layouts—Eisner went over them, but I laid it out, based on what Eisner told me to do, like panels in a panel; he gave me a basic frame to the thing.

He was big on panels within a panel?

Yeah. He went through a period of that. Even *The Spirit* had some of that. That was pure Eisner. I never liked it, but Eisner did for a while.

Before *Baseball Comics* was *Kewpies*, and that's where I began my strip *Clifford*. I did it as a two page children's story. As a matter of fact that was the first thing of mine ever in print. And then several years later in lieu of giving me a raise Eisner gave me the back page of *The Spirit*, so I did *Clifford* there.

I always thought of Clifford *as sort of doing about kids what you now do about adults.*

That was the aim. I mean, I didn't know what I was going to do about adults in those days, but I wanted to do a kid strip that was unabashedly pro-kid and from a kid's point of view. It seemed to me every strip done on kids up to that time was done from an adult point of view, saying, "Aren't they terrible, aren't they awful." And that was, of course, before *Peanuts*. Charlie Schulz took the same point of view and went a lot further with it. But it was basically the same kind of approach.

Did you ever see Harvey Kurtzman's Genius*? It was similar to* Clifford*, rather realistic humor from a kid's point of view.*

I guess not. I knew Harvey's work at the time. I knew his *Hey Look* and those things. I do remember some things where I was doing Kurtzman, the *Hey Look* thing with the characters identifying themselves as being comic book characters. I did it in one *Clifford* which never got printed because Eisner thought it was *too* far out. One of the characters, Seymour, says he's a comic book artist and he's drawing *The Spirit*, and he destroys The Spirit.

My conscious influence, when I started doing *Clifford* every week was Walt Kelly. For instance, these twins here [2/4/51, 3/4/51] were based on the cowbirds in *Pogo*. Of course they don't look like Kelly, but that's what I was trying for.

[*He looks through* Clifford *strips.*] I snuck in my John Wayne movie here [7/30/50]. And here he's fantasizing he's Cagney; this is *The Roaring Twenties* [9/10/50]. I'm doing this with my strips now, with Bernard Mergendaler—he fantasizes being Bogart. This is *The Champion* [10/1/50]. I saw a lot of movies!

This one was very personal [10/8/50]. When I was a kid my mother used to send me to the butcher and the grocer and so on, and I was always victimized by them. They'd say, "How much money have you got?" They'd just run right over me. They'd always pick the lady in front whoever she was; it didn't matter that I was there five minutes before.

Now here is the kind of thing *Peanuts* did later; "Dear Santa" [12/10/50]. Here's where Seymour exposes Santa as being in league with the rackets [12/17/50]. *Peanuts* picked up on this years later and did a thing on Santa Claus being mythical and a fake, where Lucy said it's all big business. And Eisner was very worried about letting this go, because he thought it was too cynical.

You once said that you were writing politics into The Spirit, *which Eisner would then take out.*

Yeah, that he would do. He was probably right in doing it at the time. I'm sure I was pretty heavy handed. I recall I did a Thanksgiving story [11/20/49] that was the first *Spirit* to run in New York City in some years. It had been picked up by *The Sunday Compass.* Before then it had been carried in something called *The Parkchester Review* in the Bronx or in Long Island somewhere. And then it got picked up by *The Compass,* which was a left wing paper. When *PM* went out of business it became *The Star; The Star* became *The Compass.* The editor was a guy named Ted Thackery who had formerly been the editor of *The New York Post,* but it was much more radical than *The Post.* It was an out-and-out radical New York newspaper and it was my favorite paper, and I was delighted when it picked up *The Spirit.* I figured, I've got a home, I can do anything I want. So I decided when Thanksgiving came to get more political and go against big business. So I did a Macy's-Gimbel's thing where they were fighting with each other. I didn't call them Macy's-Gimbel's but it was close. And what happened was, when *The Compass* got the strip they refused to run it. They said it was going to lose them advertising [*laughs*]. And so *my* paper, the radical paper, was the only one that complained, and we got the strip back and we had to change the names of the stores so it was even more disguised. Or I might have even used Macy's and Gimbel's, I don't know. It taught me a lesson about radicals and commerce that I hadn't learned until then. That certainly was a letdown.

Did you have anything to do with the black character Lt. Grey?

No, that was all Eisner.

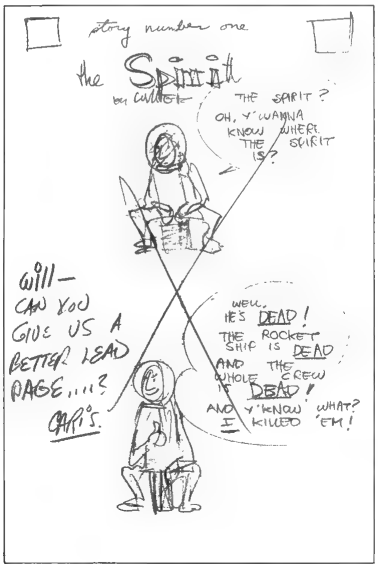
What about the influence of The Spirit *on your strip* Hostileman *[*Playboy *May and June 1969]?*

Not really, no. I don't think *The Spirit* had any influence on *Hostileman,* except maybe in terms of the color. I did the coloring for *The Spirit*; I did the silverprints. All the color done on *The Spirit* from 1947, except for the period when I was not working for Eisner, was always done by me. Even when I was writing it.

What about the angle shots in Hostileman*?*

But that's not from *The Spirit.* Eisner was never that corny. In *Hostileman* I shoot from under tables. No, I was thinking of the Fiction House style, and . . . You see, Eisner's angle shots would always have something to do with the story he was telling. Whereas the traditional comic book hacks never paid any attention to the story, they never paid any attention to the dialogue. They just threw the angles in whatever the fuck it meant. And you could never tell what was going on because *they* didn't know. It's the difference between Sinatra

Starting on 8/24/42, the Spirit *stories were only four pages long, three pages of* The Spirit Section *being reprints of Rube Rooky from* Baseball Comics. *Here is Feiffer's script for 9/28/52. Another hand, probably Eisner's, has made some erasures and changes in the dialogue. The splash was changed to a generalized montage scene.*


story number one
the Spirit
by Will Eisner
THE SPIRIT ?
OH, Y'WANNA KNOW WHERE THE SPIRIT IS?
WELL, HE'S DEAD!
THE ROCKET SHIP IS DEAD
AND THE WHOLE CREW IS DEAD!
AND Y'KNOW WHAT? I KILLED 'EM!
will— CAN YOU GIVE US A BETTER LEAD PAGE....? CAN'T.

WELL...BOYS...WE'RE HEADING HOME...FUNNY HOW MUCH LONGER THE RETURN TRIP SEEMS...
EH BIGGSY?
FOR EXAMPLE LOOK OUT THERE! BLACK EMPTY SPACE! STARS! PLANETS! A WHOLE NEW WORLD I NEVER KNEW EXISTED!
IT'S ALL A MATTER OF THE MIND I HAVE A THEORY!
BIGGSY, YOUR A ROMANTIC!
I'M NOT FOOLING! DID YOU EVER STOP TO REFLECT ANY OF THIS? BEFORE WE LEFT EARTH THIS WORLD DIDN'T EXIST EXCEPT IN OUR IMAGINATIONS! NOW WE'RE IN THIS WORLD!
HOW DO WE KNOW EARTH EXISTS? HOW DO WE KNOW THAT AINT OUR IMAGINATION! ALL I KNOW IS WHAT I SEE! THIS SPACE THIS ROCKET SHIP IS ALL I SEE!
SO TO SLEEP WILL YA!
AND IF I CLOSE MY EYES, THEN EVEN THE ROCKET SHIP DON'T EXIST—I CLOSE, I DON'T SEE IT! MAYBE EVEN YOU GUYS DON'T EXIST!
MAYBE YOU'D BETTER GET SOME SLEEP BIGGSY!
LEMME TOUCH YOU, SPIRIT!
HE'S NUTS!

being a great singer because you always heard the lyrics and somebody who could do the tune but you never knew what the hell he was saying. Eisner understood the connection between telling the story and angles. What I deliberately did in *Hostileman* was make it all wrong. So Marsha the Enormous Mother is dealing with Hostileman from a shot under the table or whatever.

In your strips recently there's been less emphasis on character and more on making points.

In the Feiffer cartoon the point never was to define character, as there was in *The Spirit*. Maybe, you know, people like Bernard over a period of years . . . and even there he's not so much a person as a symbol. Bernard is Bernard and is recognizable as such, but when you compare him to The Spirit, he's much less of an individual. Bernard is really like the Thurber character, or the Benchley character. He's a guy who stands for . . . what Charlie Brown stands for. I mean, Charlie Brown, after all these years, isn't really a person. He's much less a person than The Spirit. The Spirit has likes, dislikes, ins, outs. He has a very rounded . . . It's not what Schulz uses his kids for, it's not what I use Bernard for.

I could never write Bernard into a play; if I were writing a play I would never think of using that character. But if I ever wanted to write The Spirit into a play, you know, it's conceivable. It would be a beginning and I could build from there. I never thought of this before, but I think it's so. The Spirit's character is developed by a series of interactions and relationships. When I write a play, like *Little Murders*, you have characters who deal with each other over two hours of time and so they become real. Or else they don't become real; they die. But they have to take that test of truth. They either make it as people or they don't.

The Spirit does the same thing over a period of years in the comic strip form, simply by being eight pages long every fucking week. The Spirit had real relationships with people. He and Dolan had a real thing going, and there aren't many strips that . . . Pat Ryan had something going with the various women he knew, The Dragon Lady, Burma. It's interesting how few characters stand that test the way The Spirit does. Flash Gordon certainly doesn't independently hold up as a character. Pat Ryan does. Steve Canyon does not. Dick Tracy does not. Little Orphan Annie does.

Then there's Carl Barks' Donald Duck.

Well, Donald Duck's such an unpleasant character that I don't care if I know him or not. You know, he's a grouch. He has one dimension which is instant temper.

That's the screen Donald. The Barks Donald in the comics is different.

I haven't seen those. But let me offer you another. How about the guy who did all those *Little Lulu*'s in the Dell comics. Those were marvelous. And another guy, the father of all adventure cartoonists, Roy Crane. *Wash Tubbs* is the best adventure strip ever written. And Frank King's *Gasoline Alley*; beautiful stuff. Do you like *Abbie an' Slats*? Van Buren was one of my heroes, and his work taught me a great deal about cartooning. *Abbie an' Slats* is one of the most underrated strips, and one of the most influential—at least for me it had enormous influence. *Scribbly*'s another very important cartoon. Sheldon Mayer was the first original humorist in comic books.

But the stuff that really shaped my life was the pre-war *Spirit*. The post-war stuff is really better drawn, but this stuff *owns* you. It has a personality, and flair and style. I don't think it's just my nostalgia; I think it's something beyond that. There's nothing that matches it!

A LISTING OF JULES FEIFFER SCRIPTS

It's easy to become overcurious about the contribution of each participant in a collaborative effort; in a sense the very nature of collaboration precludes a separation of effort. The following list should be approached with caution, keeping in mind all the comments that Feiffer and Eisner have made in the previous pages about their script "collaboration." One

3
HUH!
HOW DO I KNOW WHAT I'M FEELING IS SKIN! MAYBE IT'S AIR! PLAIN AIR, AND ALL OF THIS IS JUST MY IMAGINATION!
SPIRIT SHUT 'IM UP! HE MAKES ME NOVISS!
NO NEED TO SHOUT. I'LL GO... I'LL GO TO SLEEP!
BUT I WAS SO EXCITED THAT I COULDN'T SLEEP... WHAT AN IDEA! WHAT IF IT WAS ALL TRUE?
THAT'S WAY THEY CALL ME, BUGGSY, SEE? 'CAUSE I THINK A LOT, SEE?
WHEN I WAS A KID, IF I GOT IN A JAM, SOMETIMES I'D CLOSE MY EYES...
I'D CLOSE 'EM AN' THINK, "WHEN I OPEN MY EYES I WON'T BE IN A JAM NO MORE 'CAUSE I'M MAKING IT ALL UP."
THEN I'D OPEN 'EM, HOPIN' I WAS RIGHT! BUT I WAS NEVER RIGHT! I'D STILL BE IN A JAM!
MAYBE NOW IT'S DIFFERENT! MAYBE NOW I CAN DO IT! WHEN I OPEN MY EYES, THERE WON'T BE NOTHIN'! NO ROCKET SHIP, NO SPIRIT, NO CREW!
NOTHIN'!
THEY'RE GONE!

4
THAT'S ALL I DID! [redacted] HATED.... I KILLED THEM!... JUST LIKE THAT! BLINK.
SEE?
OI YOU? YOU WANNA KNOW IF YOU'RE PART OF MY IMAGINATION? SURE YOU ARE! AS SOON AS I CLOSE MY EYES, YOU'LL BE GONE... WHAT'S THAT?
WHAT'S THAT YOU SAY? THAT IT AIN'T SO? THAT IT'S ME THAT DON'T EXIST!
YOU MEAN I EXIST IN YOUR IMAGINATION? WOULD IT.... WAIT! DON'T CLOSE YOUR EYES! IF IT'S TRUE THAT I'M ME...
WAIT, WAIT! DON'T CLOSE YOUR EYES!
DON'T CLOSE THEM! I WANNA LIVE! DON'T CLOSE YOUR EYES!
HE'S BEEN RAVING LIKE THIS FOR AN HOUR, SPIRIT! JUST LIKE HE WAS STILL CRAZY!
ITS AN OLD PHILOSOPHY BUGGSY HIT UPON " NOTHING EXISTS OUTSIDE OF MYSELF"! I GUESS SPACE IS JUST TOO MUCH FUR SOME MEN!
THAT'S WHY WE CALL HIM BUGGSY!

must remember that Eisner always contributed to a greater or lesser extent to the writing of these scripts, and also that he was in control—his was the final version. As the artist, of course, he further shaped and paced the story.

It is best to read this list as an overall indication of the sphere of Feiffer influence rather than as evidence that a particular story was definitely Feiffer's.

For example, one thing that clearly emerges in this listing is the rigorous apprenticeship period that Fieffer went through. Both Eisner and Feiffer had earlier speculated that Feiffer had begun writing Spirit *stories in 1948, but when Feiffer actually began to look over the stories he could not identify any as substantially his own until mid-1949. Before that, as Feiffer's comments below show, his contributions were so small or heavily rewritten that he could only recognize fragments of stories. As he looked through the run, Feiffer began to recognize larger segments of stories as being his, indicating greater autonomy as the apprenticeship progressed.*

Another interesting puzzle that the list seems to clear up is the question of when Feiffer went into the Army and started mailing in scripts. Both Feiffer and Eisner were a bit hazy about this, although one would think that Feiffer would remember when he went into the Army. One can see here that Feiffer had nothing to do with The Spirit *from mid-March through mid-July 1951. What else can this be but the period in basic training?*

At that same point Eisner's other commitments began to become extremely heavy (the first issue of PS magazine was June 1951) and in August 1951 Eisner stopped working on the art for The Spirit, *and probably also had less to do with the script and layout. From that point until the Outer Space series started on 7/27/52,* The Spirit *was illustrated in a very Eisner-like lackluster style. Presumably all of Feiffer's scripts for this period were mailed in to the office. Although some of these Feiffer scripts are—as scripts—excellent, without the benefit of Eisner's pictorial conceptualization the end result is minor stuff indeed, proof positive that the realization of the story by the artist is the vital element in comics.*

When The Spirit *changed to the Outer Space format, Eisner again took more direct control of the strip. In the first segment credit is given to Wally Wood and Feiffer. But though the first two stories were drawn by Wood, Eisner returned to the art for the first time in over a year to personally draw some later space episodes. Similarly, Eisner provided the concept for the series and did some of the plotting.*

The following attempt at listing Jules Feiffer's scripts for The Spirit *is based completely on his own recollections 25 years after the fact, not on objective historical records. Although the process of going through the sections took several hours, nevertheless Feiffer only skimmed most of the stories in making his determination. Feiffer's recollection seemed to be good, but several times he made absolute statements only to reverse them a short time later. This was his first professional work, and people often remember their first work better than what came later. However, it's also true that in any collaboration one is likely to recall his own contributions to the forefront. Feiffer sometimes identified a story as his while at the same time pointing out major changes made by Eisner; a reminder of the factors of collaboration which would make even a better documented listing than this one imprecise at best.*

Keeping in mind all these limitations, we've listed in bold face *all those stories which Feiffer recalls as substantially his. Comments of interest, or which clarify authorship, are included. Where comments apply to stories not substantially by Feiffer, the date is shown in italics.*

2/23/47. I think Eisner based this on some political killings in Harlem. There was a guy who worked for Vito Marcantonio in New York who got killed.

8/10/47. Wait a minute—is it possible I wrote this? I don't know. I don't know.

8/17/47. I seem to remember writing this. I may be wrong. I guess not. I guess I didn't.

8/24/47. This I know I wrote. Let me see if I'm right. No, I didn't. This is Eisner's. It's a marvelous story too.

9/21/47. I believe this is my handwriting in the ship's log.

10/26/47. I don't remember doing this, and yet things like the "Committee of Un-natural Activities" . . . It's easier to imagine me doing it than Eisner. And stuff like this, "Why, that's the very reactionary literature adults would have us read to keep us kids from growing up to usurp their position in society." That sounds more like me. It's hard to remember, but one of the problems may be that Eisner may have done a lot more rewriting than I remember on stuff that I did. The only explanation I can give you is that some of these I worked on and Eisner reworked.

4/25/48. I think these commercials were written by Abe Kanigsen.

10/31/48. I might have had something to do with this. It seems to me one of the early ones I wrote was about Hazel. Maybe I just gave ideas out before I was writing, and we talked stories out. Because some of these were clearly not written by me, and yet I recognize things that could or should be mine.

12/12/48. God damn, this looks like my stuff. This two part thing I seem to remember. I don't remember writing it; it's as if I had an idea and Eisner reworked it.

12/26/48. I think I must have had something to do with this. Oh sure, this is reruns from the past year. Yeah, I think I put this together.

1/30/49. When I saw this is seemed to me that I did it, and yet as I go through it I don't remember it. This song "You and Me Alone" is a parody of "I'd Like to Get You on a Slow Boat to China," which I know was in my head a lot those days. What must have happened was that I'd write these and Eisner would rewrite them so extensively that they'd really be his and not mine.

2/6/49. This I *know* is mine. And yet a lot of this is rewritten by Eisner. This is from listening to Sam Spade on the radio.

3/27/49. I think I either wrote this or collaborated on it. I guess it is basically Eisner's, but I know I had something to do with it.

4/24/49. Who else but Eisner would do a parody of his own character and make it work, where a cartoon is imitating another cartoon. Now that's rather extraordinary! But he can do it, because his characters have such a reality that you can go right by without anybody noticing it. It's just absolutely right.

5/1/49. This may or may not be something I did. Oh, here's the name Edward Lamb, so this must be mine. By a coincidence I'd used that name, which was the name of a publisher of a newspaper that carried the strip, and they threatened to sue. And yet for the life of me I don't remember writing this. I don't remember the story.

5/29/49. Now this may be the official first. I did the lead page and wrote the story. But a lot of the story reads to me like Eisner, so I think he must have rewritten just about everything.

6/5/49. I wrote this; no question. Eisner rewrote the splash; I had something else in there. I remember this as the first one that I really did all the way through. This is my story. The others were Eisner stories that I did some work on, this is my story that Eisner did some work on. I think that's the difference. I mean, a lot of the dialogue was rewritten by him and all the narrative stuff simply isn't mine.

6/26/49. The idea of the story is something I would write, but I don't remember having written it.

7/3/49. I seem to remember having a lot to do with this, but I'm not sure I wrote it.

7/10/49.

7/17/49. Again, Eisner would rewrite some of the dialogue, or a lot of it.

7/24/49. Something like this couldn't be Eisner's. "Did you ever consider the fact that The Spirit is not so much a real figure as a figment of the public's imagination? A symbol of justice to the good . . . a symbol of terror to the wicked. *Anyone* wearing a blue mask and gloves could be The Spirit!" I mean, that's clearly Feiffer. I'm surprised I didn't talk about him being Jewish there.

7/31/49. I remember doing the lead on this. I don't remember the rest of the stories.

8/7/49. This I know I did. But you can be sure that anything done in gothic lettering was written by Eisner. I could never write in that kind of Westbrook van Voorhees *Time Magazine* style, which Eisner was always good at. This certainly doesn't read like my dialogue. You know, I can't say, I can't say. It doesn't read like mine. But I would write some of them and Eisner would go over them quite lavishly, so it's hard to know.

8/14/49.

8/21/49.

8/28/49.

9/4/49.

9/11/49.

9/18/49. I think Abe Kanigson wrote most of these ads. As a matter of fact they look like they were drawn by him; this is his drawing in this ad. So there's no question that he wrote them.

9/25/49. No, I never wrote any Italians. This must be Eisner's.

10/2/49.

10/16/49. I loved folk songs in those days. "Jimson Weed." I was very proud of that name.

10/23/49. Reynard the Fox. Which Eisner in his sneaky way drew to resemble me at the time, or his version of me. I once had hair.

10/30/49. I think I did write this. Yes, I seem to remember the idea of The Spirit on crutches leaping up in the air.

11/13/49. This seems to be mine; at least I remember the lead page. I seem to remember doing it, but it's so Eisnerish, it's such a complete use of all sorts of things that he's done before, that it doesn't really matter if I did it, it's really his.

11/20/49.

11/27/49. That's one of my favorites. But the name Quadrant J. Stet is Eisner's.

12/4/49. I think that's mine, but not a very good one.

12/11/49. This is a rewrite of an early story [3/16/41], the first one that Satin appears in, where she and The Spirit are fighting and she puts the diamond down the front of her dress. That was all swiped by Eisner from a Clark Gable-Rosalind Russell film called *They Met in Bombay* [1940]. Except that in the movie Gable reaches into her bosom and takes out the jewel. I think I did do the rewrite.

12/25/49.

1/1/50. This is just a throwaway; this is, how do we not work while working.

1/8/50. This is not The Spirit. This is John Law with a mask added. Eisner tried a strip in a comic book once called John Law, which never came out. And since it didn't work out, he just put a mask on the character and turned him into The Spirit and used him in the Sunday sections.

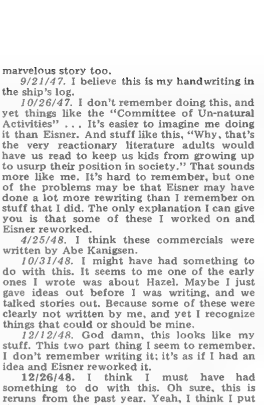
1/15/50. This is more from the John Law book.

1/29/50. I suspect this is mine. But I wouldn't have had the name "Rat" Trapp. So maybe this is not my strip. Grandenetti drew most of this; not very well either, I might say.

2/5/50. I think I wrote this one, yes.

2/12/50.

2/26/50. This is a bastard version of the one



I used in *The Great Comic Book Heroes* [7/20/41].

3/5/50. "Sammy and Delilah" was Eisner's, a take off of the Victor Mature movie [*released the previous year*].

3/12/50. The splash is the cover of John Law comics, as I remember. The rest of the story is new.

3/19/50.

3/26/50. I loved writing this kind of stuff: "Heat," all this stuff. This is all my layout on page 4. [*Interviewer points out silent panel, bottom of page 3.*] Well, Eisner was marvelous at the silent panel. The two guys who were best at the silent panel were Eisner and Caniff. And I used to try to write the silent panel in *The Spirit*. One would not know it today [*laughs*].

4/9/50. I don't remember writing this one. Maybe I did. It's possible.

4/16/50. I loved this! This is a superhero, and the income tax people come down to investigate his taxes.

4/23/50.

5/7/50. This is Andre le Blanc's. He drew it and wrote it too, I'm sure. [*Possibly this was originally done for the never released second issue of* Kewpies.] He did marvelous work on "Intellectual Amos" earlier in the Spirit section.

5/21/50.

5/28/50. Notice how the art style in the flashback is different. Eisner didn't do any of that—just the first pages. I don't know who did this art. Let's see, I think I did write this. I have a hunch it might have come from the Rube Rooky *Baseball Comics*. See, Dolan's supposedly telling the story here, but it's not Dolan's voice at all, while it does sound like the voice of the character Pop Fly, who was the manager in Rube Rooky. This must have been planned for *Baseball Comics* # 2, which never came out. [*Note: though the pages in the story are printed in their numbered order, page 5 should actually precede page 4.*]

6/4/50. I took a week off from Eisner, and a friend of mine and I went down to Florida, the first time I'd ever gone anywhere. I visited an alligator farm, and picked up two hookers to get laid for the first time, but we didn't have a car, so we couldn't. And I came back and did this story about an alligator. "Economic imperialism"; can you imagine?

6/18/50. This is another pick-up. Eisner did samples for a daily, called "Nubbin," who was a little shoeshine boy. And that's what this is. He put those Nubbin dailies together, or redrew them, I don't remember. But this looks like the originals. He was not going to throw anything away! And here he brought in The Spirit. Later on we reused the character in original material.

6/25/50. "B.T. on wheat, mayo," that's automatically mine. "Draw one": there are certain dead giveaways.

7/2/50.

7/16/50. I drew some of these footprints; they were very bad. The good footprints were done by Abe.

7/23/50.

7/30/50. This is out of radio, and *The Petrified Forest*. But the opening text is Eisner's. "Diners are a harbor in the sea of concrete and landscape." Never. I would be much too self-conscious to use that. And in the dialogue, Eisner would say, "Eh, wot'll it be?" and "Java." I would never do that. "Kinda warm for gloves ain't it mister?" I once had a thing about The Spirit taking a shower in his gloves. Wonderful atmosphere here: it feels like a diner. Good stuff. Now, but here, throwing the cap in his face and this action business, all that would be pure Eisner. I'd never be able to think of stuff like that.

8/6/50.

8/13/50.

8/20/50.

8/27/50. This I think I wrote.

9/3/50.

9/17/50.

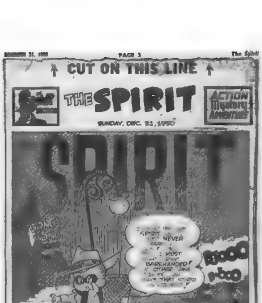
9/24/50. I love this. I did this as a layout first; I laid it out just like this. The character looks like Eisner; if you take the hairpiece off and the mustache it looks exactly like him. It's interesting how he drew himself.

10/1/50.

10/8/50.

10/22/50.

10/29/50. This was one of my political ones. "The DAWH, the Descendents of American Witch Hunters." "We've decided to take a firm stand on witchcraft." "The time for



coddling the witchly elements in our society has passed! This is the time for action!"

11/5/50. More politics. I sneaked it in. I think. I read somewhere that there were a bunch of French Foreign Legionnaires who were ex-Nazis helping the French in Indo-China. "Viet Nam, or as the Western countries call it . . . Indo China." That's amazing! Because when Viet Nam happened and I became aware of it I didn't remember this at all. I didn't remember ever knowing of Viet Nam. I mean, I know I wrote it. But where did I get this information? This is incredible! This is 19-fucking-50. Five-oh. That's four years before Richard Nixon sent off a trial balloon saying that the US should send forces to Viet Nam to relieve the French, and Hubert Humphrey seconded him. I'm very impressed with myself. My first Viet Nam strip was November 1950! Who says I'm not an activist?

11/12/50.

11/19/50. This is an old joke.

11/26/50.

12/3/50.

12/10/50. This is no good, but I wrote it.

12/17/50. This is also no good, but I wrote it.

12/24/50.

12/31/50. I'm sure I didn't have . . . well, maybe I had me shooting Eisner, but my guess is I just had a guy shooting him, and Eisner turned it into me when he drew it. Or maybe I did have me killing him . . . we weren't getting along very well with each other at the time [*laughs*]. You know, this was all before the existence of *Mad*. This is a parody of adventures from the previous year of *The Spirit*. What I did was actually take direct quotes from the stories: "Oh shut up with the sharp talk and hold me . . . tight Denny . . . tight." The "vital statistics" were all invented.

1/7/51.

1/14/51. I wrote whatever there is to write; it's just bullshit.

1/21/51.

1/28/51.

2/4/51.

2/11/51.

2/18/51.

3/4/51. This is a rewrite of a pre-war story [10/4/42]. I can't even tell if I did the rewrite.

3/18/51. I must have written this. It seems to me that I did.

4/1/51. This is very Eisnerish. It seems to me that if I wrote this, and I'm not sure I did, that Eisner and I wrote it together. It may even be a reworking of an old story. It has a strong flavor of Eisner. So maybe it's Eisner. So I can't claim it.

7/15/51.

7/29/51. I think I wrote this one, but I'm not sure.

8/12/51. It seems to me I probably wrote this. I remember stuff like using the TV picture, and the broken tube at the end. I don't remember the story at all. But I did write it.

8/19/51. No. There was never a point in my life when I could have written "The waterfront—silent in its terror—lonely save for the wet lips of the fog that caress it . . ."

8/26/51.

9/2/51.

9/9/51.

9/16/51. This looks interesting. I don't think I wrote it. Maybe I *did* write it. I don't know. No, I don't think so. It's a nice story.

9/23/51.

9/30/51.

10/7/51. I can't say about this one. It doesn't seem familiar.

10/14/51.

10/21/51. I must have written this, but I don't remember it. The reason I think so is that I don't know anybody but me that would go back and do a story all in type like this. Unless Eisner himself was writing at that time, and I don't think he was. If he was, he might have done it.

10/28/51.

11/4/51. No. I would never write a gorilla.

11/11/51. This is pure Capra here . . . or Sturges. It's pure Eisner as well, but . . .

11/25/51.

12/2/51. I think so.

12/9/51. Eisner might have written this. He liked the idea of balloon travel.

12/16/51. I don't know about this. I might have written this just because The Spirit gets beaten up so badly [*laughs*]. When I was angry at Eisner I liked to knock the shit out of The Spirit.

12/23/51.

12/30/51. I don't remember about this one.

1/6/52. That's all Eisneresque. This is like the little man who flies.

1/13/52.

1/20/52.

1/27/52. This is a reaction to the fact that Eisner felt that the feature was losing circulation, and talked about turning it into a space strip, which revolted me. And this was my parody on the idea of what I thought he wanted to turn The Spirit into.

2/10/52. I might have written this, because of this idea with the snow forts, but I honestly can't remember.

2/17/52. This is really a spin-off of the early 1940-41 Eisner stuff with Ellen Dolan, when Ellen had a lot more life to her.

2/24/52.

3/2/52. This was my Sam Spade period.

3/9/52. And this is kind of James M. Cain-ish.

3/16/52. I can't remember about this one.

3/23/52. This must have been me; I used "Greensleeves."

4/13/52. I think I wrote this.

4/27/52.

5/4/52. I had a lot of fun on that, with the subtitles.

5/11/52.

5/18/52. I think I did it.

5/25/52. I don't remember about this one. Cyrus Flunder—that could be my name or Eisner's, I don't remember.

6/1/52.

6/8/52.

6/15/52. I wasn't thinking of me and Eisner here. Maybe I was thinking of Al Capp and Ham Fisher. The whole form is an old suspense story. It's really out of radio.

6/22/52. I wrote this. But you know, I'm not even sure I did it, because it's pure Eisner . . . that whole thing of the chase down the street.

7/6/52.

7/13/52.

7/20/52.

7/27/52. You know, I don't remember this. I wouldn't have known it was mine, except that my name is on it. As I said the whole idea of a space strip revolted me. I think I must have been in the Army at the time. If I were in New York I think I would have resisted it—either talked him out of it or maybe quit, or whatever. Once I was in the Army I didn't care about the strip any more. It was just extra money, so I wrote what I had to.

9/28/52. [*Note: Feiffer definitely wrote this story, since the script survives. It is likely that Feiffer scripted other space stories, which ran from 7/27/52 to 10/5/52, the end of the series. But he says,* "I have no memory of these; I can't tell what I wrote and what I didn't write."]

Recorded January 21, 1974

A SOUR LOOK AT THE COMIX SCENE

The following article, which originally appeared in the San Francisco Phoenix *in early 1973, was written in response to a then emerging trend in underground comics that was disturbing to the author. Time has shown that underground comics have, on the whole, survived the onslaught. But, says Griffith, by way of introduction to this republication, "I agree with everything I said in this piece. Even though a lot of ink has passed under the bridge since early '73 (now there's a well mixed metaphor!), I guess it's still relevant to today's comics scene. The only thing that's really changed is my intensity of feeling. Now that I'm creeping toward 40 instead of 30, my tolerance for "barbarian"-type comics is considerably altered, though not necessarily lowered. I just ignore it these days; it has nothing to do with me. In a way, I even give it its place (which I did, though with reluctance, in '73). It's really only the flip side of the personal, ironic, humor/literate type of comics, after all. You can't have day without night. Maybe I've been in California too long and I'm starting to* mellow, *God forbid!"*

There's a taboo that says an artist cannot be a critic of the work of his peers or himself, especially in a new and changing medium. Not in print, at least. Not unless he knows karate.

Well, we're an iconoclastic lot, we cartoonists, and taboo-breaking is one of our main stocks-in-trade. So, prepare the altar, please, Mr. Toad's got a Sacred Cow on the leash just aching to be sacrificed.

I've been at the drawing board just over four years now, trying to make people laugh . . . but I have this problem. Every so often, I start to ruminate about "The Industry." I ask myself questions: "Why are so many books coming out in which I can't find even one page that I like?

"Why is there a tendency in the underground comic to resemble a slightly altered version of aboveground comix?

"What's this business with the TITS and MONSTERS and WEREWOLVES?

"Why bother going over to the Comic Book Store this week? It'll only bring me down."

It DOES bring me down and I'd like to talk about it.

First, I'm not interested here in naming names or titles or publishers or synopsizing plots. It should be obvious to anyone who follows comix even casually what I mean.

It's also obvious that my view is completely subjective and vulnerable to attack. But I'm a bad boy, see . . . that's how I was raised. Also, I may occasionally slip into my Mr. Toad voice when absolutely necessary—like right now!

Hey, I wanta know what's "underground" about rotting corpses! Besides buryin' 'em, huh? And inflated rubber women with bulbous, 48-inch chests? And all that half-baked, crackpot science fiction creeping onto the racks that was pathetic back in the '50s when it was at least new?

Sure, there are things to say graphically about the way a machine gun burst rips open naked female flesh, but once you've said it, it's been said! Hey, I'm no censor. Hey! But, sincerely, I mean . . . don't get me wrong! Violent death can be very, very — well — very absorbing! Just like S-E-X!! Lemme tell you what gets my gall. Lemme tell you what I find hard to swallow! AN ARTIST BEING UNCONSCIOUS OF HIS OWN BASIC MOTIVES!

And that's where the fantasy genre of the "Sword-and-Sorcery" or "After-the-Holocaust" variety gets very tricky.

When an artist's central characters and/or protagonists are depicted as overly developed, seminude musclemen, or robots, or cute humanoids with beguiling eyes, the line between what's loosely defined as "the concerns of underground comix" and simple escapist fiction with, perhaps, a facade of "relevance" becomes more than hazy. It disappears entirely. And, aside from the explicit sex and the use of naughty words, it falls into the "above-ground" category with ease. Which is probably where it belongs and, most likely, will end up.

Now the question:

"Okay, if it's only pyrotechnics and thin fantasy, then what is it the appreciative reader (of which there are many) is getting off on?"

At a quick glance, we have a sci/fi-sex-ecology tale usually set in "another world," rendered with careful attention to musculature and lighting effects. The drawing is almost pretty taken out of context. And there is a predictable plot usually involving pathos or revenge and a hefty dose of spilled guts, exploding brains and "Good Lord, (choke)s."

But probe under the surface and what's going on?

A thin layer of highlighted green skin cannot disguise an ugly kind of unconscious prepubescent misogynous obsession with strength and power, particularly over women who are usually either in dire need of rescuing or are gratuitously murdered by "unfeeling monsters" (the Establishment?).

And there are other men-creatures, equally well-muscled who lock into sinewy, smashing mortal combat at the drop of an insult. It's all so embarrassingly transparent.

There's no distance from the material, just a wallowing in it. No moment is undercut with humor or examination. And not only are the stories "non-underground" in their concerns, but they pander to similarly unconscious people who have a need to be fed this pablum of sex and gore—unfiltered by irony or intelligence or a sense of absurdity.

The orientation is strictly "fanzine."

Fanzines are very hard to define to anyone unfamiliar with them. Briefly, they are sporadically published, sometimes lavishly produced amateur magazines put out by and for comic fans whose basic interest is in the look and feel of aboveground comic art.

BIAS AND BILE BY BILL GRIFFITH

Recently they've crept into underground comic racks, partly because several cartoonists have "come out" of their world and are now leading some fanzine people into underground comix.

Okay, let 'em have their fun! Kids will be kids! But that kind of FLUFF will all be forgotten eventually, it'll fade like yesterday's paper, back into the obscurity from which it came. "Mind candy"—is what our readers want? Well, they're welcome to it! It's just not my trip!

There's another major putsch by the fan/fantasy/horror-type cartoonist.

And, by the way, these people have a perfect right to make a living, don't get me wrong, hey!

It's led by the E.C. revivalists who refer back to the "E.C. Tradition" for their role models. I'm not talking about artists who find their ROOTS in the E.C. period, only those who are POSSESSED by it, who REVERE it. What's E.C.?

Well, remember when *Mad* was ten cents? That was the E.C. period. There were daring and innovative comic books produced in the fabulous '50s.

In the kids' comic field they were pretty topnotch. The artwork was of a uniformly high caliber—dense and rich. And the writing had a bite to it, for a while.

I'm not a connoisseur and I won't go into a breakdown of who was better than who, but I recognize the mastery of the E.C. creators, as well as other innovators or just-off-the-wall artists of the '40s and '50s.

What's really important to recognize is that comics, then, were still an unevolved art form for all their technical prowess and tight execution.

They were held back by their times, restrained, leashed by the law, by economic realities and public reaction. On the other hand, underground comix have burrowed through to the daylight as an evolved art form, bringing together diverse elements and ideas.

Granted there are weak spots and there have been occasional false moves, but, at their best, they are revelational, cathartic, beautiful.

They trigger thought, strike chords of recognition—they have an almost unlimited range of subject matter and meaning. They catch you off-guard. There are moments of genuine illumination in the best of them.

There is insight into personality, character, gesture, childhood, the news, human interaction, social setups, neuroses, DIRTY JOKES AND TOILET PAPER!!! You name it!

So what do we need with the E.C. tradition? Or what's gone before us in general? As artists, we can learn from it; as readers we can appreciate it.

But let the comics creeps dicher over a panel drawn 20 years ago!

Let them fight it out over a misshapen shoulder blade on page 25 or debate on which is the world's most beautiful comic book cover! Fandom! Comicdom! How did they get IN here, anyway? Jeezis, let's be grownups! We're gonna be 30 soon!

"Underground"—what the hell does that mean? Why am I in a puritanical rage?

I'm not! I've merely spied the intruders at the gates (I KNOW it's FUTILE). I watched them ooze over the balustrades. I can hear them now chomping noisily on rancid intestines over in the corner. And I DON'T GET IT!

Why does the underground audience want that kind of crap? "Art" by one guy, "script" by another—why not go all the way back to the assembly-like techniques I thought we had left behind?

Why not hire a writer, a penciler, an inker, a letterer, a color-separator, an editor—Mr. Man—the whole schmeer!

Hey, I hear D.C. is putting out an imitation underground comic book soon. Maybe this is what it's all come to! But let me off. Me and my cohorts have better things to do. Big plans! We're still learning, getting better every day, workin' our asses off for you people!

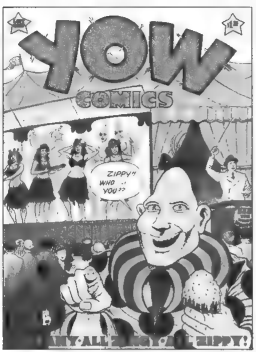
This medium can be as smart and tough a form of popular entertainment as we both make it. And entertainment, painful or otherwise, is the vehicle we're riding into your living room.

"Laugh, laugh, I thought I'd cry, it seemed so funny to me . . ."

Who sang that . . . the Beau Brummels?

Now how did they know they were making a comment on the value of underground comix?

REVIEWS



Zippy Stories No. 1, by Bill Griffith. Rip Off Press. 52 pages. 95¢

Yow No. 1, by Bill Griffith. Last Gasp. 36 pages. $1.25.

Bill Griffith thinks in comics images the way painters are supposed to think in paint: "I just slug it out panel by panel," he once said, when asked if he ever did rough breakdowns before starting a piece. Griffith lets the structure of his comics emerge gradually as he works on them, an approach that forces his readers to abandon their preconceptions about comics and to read Griffith's work with an unusually high degree of concentration and attentiveness. The design of Griffith's comics, once we have learned to breathe the atmosphere of his world, always becomes apparent sooner or later. His work is often complex and demanding, but it is never arbitrary or incoherent.

"Ticket to Mars," the lead piece in *Zippy Stories* # 1, a collection of Griffith's weekly strips from the *Berkeley Barb*, is a case in point. Its meandering plot takes Zippy from a "B"-movie-style carnival episode, to Disneyland ("Try to appreciate the cuteness!"), on to a meeting—after Zip starts "being bad" and letting the plot get out of hand—with "Professor" Griffy and Nutso, a robot who generates "story elements." Along the way, there are stopovers in L.A., San Francisco and Canarsie (where Zippy teams up briefly with Didi Glitz in a sequence jammed by Griffith and Diane Noomin). It's quite a mix—but, with Zippy around, "Ticket to Mars" works as a continuous, though loose-jointed, narrative (not for nothing is Zip known as the *picaresque* Pinhead!) and is a perfect introduction to the collection of one-pagers that make up the rest of the book. Most of these feature other regulars from Griffith's cast of characters, but Zippy reappears in the closing pages. In the final interior strip, he lights up the beacon on top of the Transamerica Pyramid Building ("S.F.'s monument to kitsch") with brainwaves from his pinhead, thereby casting a lurid and goofy retrospective glow over the entire contents of *Zippy Stories*.

In a recent interview (*Cascade Comix Monthly* # 5), Griffith described his work as being "about that strange 'comic book reality' in which the artist is always present, but doesn't always make an appearance." How much "artistic presence" can comics take; and how closely should we identify Griffith with "Griffy," or with his other characters? Griffith has tackled these questions with increasing directness in the ambitious, very personal pieces that comprise much of his recent work. When *Cascade* asked him to talk about "The Unspeakable Truth," the story-within-a-story in "The Toad and the Madman" (*Arcade* # 7), Griffith replied, "I wanted to pull that curtain aside. It was a very scary one to do. I wasn't in a very Zippy mood at the time." Part of the excitement of *Zippy Stories* # 1 is its audacious, playful approach to the same delicate issues—as in "Understand Your Zippy Nature," in which Griffy, sitting with Zippy in a Chinese restaurant, goes on a talking jag about theory of humor and lets the Pinhead pick up the tab!

Griffith's most recent exploration of "comic book reality" is *Yow* # 1, a daring and accomplished book whose conscious design—Griffith, as always, is his own best editor!—is to stretch everyone's "Zippy Nature" to the breaking point. *Yow* must also have been "a very scary one to do": Griffith ran a considerable risk of spoiling his most popular and flexible character by using Zippy up or explaining him away. By the end of the book, the separation between "comic book reality" and the outside world is paper-thin.

Yow's lead story, "A Dope in High Places," shows that Griffith's ability to transfix 70's types with a few apparently offhand touches is as deadly-accurate as ever. Zippy's fellow characters—a collection of bigwigs, hustlers and hangers-on from politics and the mass media—are portrayed in meticulous detail and with malicious gusto, but they emerge as morally-defective, fallible human beings, not as monsters or stock villains. Zippy's presence in "High Places" has allowed Griffith to satirize contemporary life without being sanctimonious or self-righteous—and without being constantly on the attack. "High Places" has several moments—like the splash panel of a Nevada "guest ranch" and the Central Park South ice-skating scene—of unexpected visual poetry: Griffith has never been one to believe that art should do only one thing at a time.

In "Zippy's Day," the wordless piece that follows "High Places," the contemporary world relaxes its hold: the panels are filled with calendars, clocks and timebound visual details that are "out of synch" with one another. Griffith turns the Pinhead loose in Las Vegas, armed only with an accordion and a pair of binoculars, and lets "Zippy Nature" take its course. The delicately-crosshatched shadows on the first page establish the story's gentle mood effectively and unobtrusively, and the oversized, unoutlined panels are like glimpses of the world through Zippy's binoculars. The imagery—donuts, assorted funny hats, a mudbath, a row of one-armed bandits, the monstrous statue of "Last Chance Joe"—is appropriately Zippyesque without being forced or contrived. Zippy's toy toad, grinning at us with outstretched arms in the last panel as if to keep us at a proper distance from the Pinhead's dreamworld, is the only reminder that Griffith might have chosen to show us Las Vegas in other, less lyrical, ways.

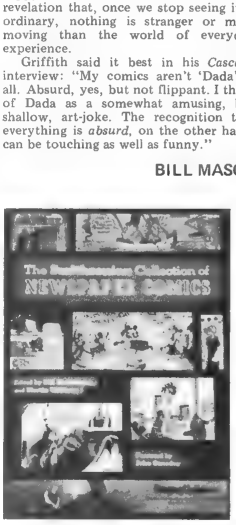
Does art impose form on life or do things work the other way around? "Pertinent Points about Pinheads," a collection of startlingly surrealistic coincidences (among them, "a spate of apparent Zippy spin-offs"), raises the question. "Time out of Mind," in which Zippy and his fantasy-life are cast adrift among the historical dioramas in New York's Museum of Natural History, explodes it. "Time out of Mind" is Griffith's most elaborate and funniest Zippy story to date. Griffith's nuanced and painstaking (though never labored) rendering of a crazily-mixed, potentially limitless series of atmospheres and dialects—an amazingly sustained display of visual and narrative *wit*—could well be the breakdown to end all breakdowns. It could easily have been the Zippy story to end all Zippy stories, too—but, somehow (hint: notice Zip cheating at the Indian rope trick in the splash panel), the Pinhead brings it off: he's not even tired at the end!

"Leave them Laughing," *Yow*'s closing story, belies its reassuring title and its early-50's freakshow setting. The first six pages of humorous/sentimental narrative are deftly handled: there's lots to look

at, and several subtle bits of irony and self-parody keep the story from getting "mushy" or cloying. But nothing prepares us for Zippy's (and Griffith's) last and sneakiest act of "spiritual shoplifting," an EC-style twist ending in which the freaks take over the sideshow and put a collection of "normal" people on exhibit. The reverse-freak idea is not original, but the effect that Griffith gets from it is. The final panels of "Leave Them Laughing" are *Yow*'s coda: Zippy's "new acts" are the ultimate revelation that, once we stop seeing it as ordinary, nothing is stranger or more moving than the world of everyday experience.

Griffith said it best in his *Cascade* interview: "My comics aren't 'Dada' at all. Absurd, yes, but not flippant. I think of Dada as a somewhat amusing, but shallow, art-joke. The recognition that everything is *absurd*, on the other hand, can be touching as well as funny."

BILL MASON



The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics, edited by Bill Blackbeard and Martin Williams. Smithsonian Institution Press and Harry N. Abrams. 336 pages, 92 in color. No price given.

The following review was originally intended for the New York Times Sunday Book Review. *(The last time the* Book Review *devoted any critical space to comics was in September 1976, when it printed the Leslie Fiedler piece referred to below.) The* Smithsonian *review was rejected and the book was simply given a plug in their Paperback Talk column which focused on the publishing mechanics of how Abrams and the Smithsonian joined forces. It went on to recommend the volume as great nostalgic junk for kids from six to 66.*

Too bad. Not because of the ego-kicks I could have gotten from a by-line in the New York Times, *but because the Smithsonian collection is a landmark anthology which implicitly demands that one take the medium seriously and provides enough evidence to justify that demand.*

One of our most vital artistic inventions, the comic strip, still struggles to break out of the cultural closet. In Europe, specifically France, the form's potency is much admired. The process of appropriating our indigenous forms, like movies and jazz, and returning them with a certificate of cultural validation is taking place once again. At home their true value is undermined by several prevailing attitudes. Most pernicious is an uncritical and self-congratulatory nostalgia that surrounds the subject. The notion that comics are dismissable kid stuff, vulgar junk unworthy of critical analysis is still prevalent; so is the kind of intellectual slumming that condescendingly celebrates them *because* they are vulgar. The least objectionable approach thus far has been one of interest in them as sociological documents or twentieth century folk art, but this eclipses their worth as genuine art, the creations of gifted individuals. Even as perceptive a cultural analyst as Leslie Fiedler resists their coming of age, dismissing a recent flurry of comics histories, anthologies and encyclopedias—symptoms of a medium in transition—as "great fat mortuary books," fearing that they are helping to "turn what was once living myth into dead mythology."

The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics while great and generously fat, is anything but a graveyard. The book rescues some of our liveliest comic art from the slow-burning forest fire that is newsprint. The many well-printed color plates verify Hearst's boastful description of his Sunday comics as a "polychromous effulgence that makes the rainbow look like a lead pipe." This is a high quality production, but it is the knowledgeability of the editorial selection that makes this book the most significant of its kind.

While the editors provide a sampling of the most popular achievements, they focus on the finest, even if those suffered popular neglect. Extended examples are given of several strips, like *Dick Tracy,* Chester Gould's expressionist nightmare, to capture the flavor and rhythm of daily continuity. When offering strips with which we may already feel a familiarity, the editors tend to present previously unanthologized examples which give new insights or demand our reappraisal. We are given some powerful *Krazy Kat* pages, George Herriman's justly celebrated variations on the theme of brick-throwing. We are also exposed to its progenitor, *The Family Upstairs,* which varied a less developed theme: the Dingbat family's thwarted revenge on their never-seen neighbors who reside above the strip. Not only is Winsor McCay's majestic *Little Nemo in Slumberland* herein, but an homage in the form of parody—*Nibsy the Newsboy in Funny Fairyland* by George McManus, creator of Maggie and Jiggs.

Frank King's *Gasoline Alley* is shown to have been not only the saga of a rural American family, but an adventurous graphic exploration as well. Those acquainted with *Popeye* only as the spinach-eating automaton of Saturday morning television will be jolted by Elzie Segar's genius for creating theatrical characters (indeed, the strip was originally entitled *Thimble Theater*) as memorable as any from that more venerable medium.

Beyond reintroducing the already familiar, the volume flashes such lost gems as Lyonel Feininger's *The Kinder Kids,* unseen since its brief appearances in the *Chicago Tribune* of 1907. Not only does the strip's formal sophistication indicate that its creator was even more important as a cartoonist than a painter, it substantiates the theory that the greatest works in any medium are often done in the earliest years, before it can be encumbered by tradition and formula.

Almost all the selections hint at the expressive range available to the comics: from the sentimental polemics of Harold Gray's *Little Orphan Annie* to Harry Tuthill's misanthropic indictment of the middle class in *The Bungle Family*; from the anarchistic raucousness of the *Katzenjammer Kids* to the precocious sophistication of *Barnaby*; from the vital doodle-drawings of Milt Gross to the equally vital graphic mastery of McCay and Feininger.

Virtually no critical vocabulary exists to acknowledge this range. As a result, the editors, in their brief and occasionally useful text, make a well-intentioned but misguided bid for literary antecedents. Their attempts to trace Happy Hooligan's genealogy back to Dostoyevsky's Prince Mishkin or to find Barney Google's roots in Dickens' Artful Dodger —Dickens, whose art also appeared

serially, is invoked repeatedly—smack of academicism. The comic strip doesn't need a pedigree. It is a bastard child, born of the plastic arts, specifically caricature, and sired by literature. Its closest companion is cinema, which not only shares its concern with temporal movement, but has had to fight a similar battle for legitimacy.

Like all popular art, the comics have had to struggle for life in the area between the needs of the creator and those of the marketplace—and between the panels are the scars of that trauma. Cliff Sterrett's *Polly and Her Pals* reached giddy graphic heights and was chastised by its syndicate for becoming as obscure as *Krazy Kat*. In fact, Herriman's apogee of the form survived only because Hearst, on the advice of his young nephew, insisted on it.

The comic strip has seldom been allowed to stray too far from its original function of peddling papers, but the halcyon days when the entire nation could be stunned by Li'l Abner's marriage to Daisy Mae are gone. Popular attention has shifted to televised dreams and the romantic entanglements of Laverne and Shirley. The space devoted to newspaper strips, like the number of newspapers that hosted them has shrunk; but the legacy remains of a medium whose *full* potential has yet to be explored.

The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics succeeds to a great degree in its avowed purpose as stated by Edmund Wilson in a quotation that opens the book: "I have enormous respect for the comic strip as a potential story and art form, although far too few of its productions have realized that potential. If those few could be gathered into some sort of complete collection, the effect on those who have scorned the comics as a whole might be devastating."

An Afterthought: I love *the Smithsonian book, but—offstage now, not trying to address an uncaring audience—I'd like to confess an unhappy discovery. Most of this material—and it is the crème de la crème—doesn't lure me back for repeated reading. Oh, I enjoy* looking *at some of the more stunning graphics again and again, but with the exception of Herriman, I don't expect to* re-read *any of it until enough time has passed to dim my memory of the jokes and stories.*

Great Art requires that one habituate oneself to it. That is, it offers up more *as acquaintance ripens into friendship and possibly love. Though some comics are strong enough to survive that struggle between "the needs of the creator and those of the marketplace," they are too often maimed by it as well. Comics* accommodate *their audience but are seldom allowed to insist that the* audience *pay attention and do the accommodating. (As always, Herriman's* Kat *is a notable exception.)*

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that some of the strips in the Smithsonian book aren't great. Just not great enough.

ART SPIEGELMAN

A Disturbing Evening and Other Stories, by Mark Beyer. 36 pages. $1.50. (Available postpaid from Mark Beyer, P.O. Box 2304, Allentown, Pa. 18110.)

Most immediately striking about Mark Beyer's *A Disturbing Evening* is its child-like appearance. Drawn in a crudely simple style in which both figures and backgrounds are disproportionate and flattened, the book convincingly conveys a child's way of seeing and expressing reality. Ironically, this naive sensibility is largely articulated by a very sophisticated graphic approach. By mining the anatomical and spatial qualities of children's art, Beyer has fashioned a graphic experience of particular richness and complexity. Weaving together primitive shapes and patterns in an energetic, but symmetrical and orderly way, he has created a tapestry of visual power and mystery that is awing. This simultaneous expression of both naivety and sophistication makes *A Disturbing Evening* a revealingly paradoxical experience.

The dichotomy runs throughout the book, not only in the illustration, but in the use of comics language and narrative. Expanding on Lyonel Feininger's pioneering use of varied panel shapes so that he can mine the potential of the resulting increased space between the panels, Beyer effectively works on *both sides* of the panel borders. He extends his simple shapes and designs beyond the barriers of the panel to achieve a heightened feeling of child-like size and immediacy. This repetition of similar motifs and patterns within and outside of the panels creates a distorted mirror-like quality that is at once graphically and psychologically moving. The balloons, overly large and awkwardly placed (often at the bottom of the panel), are characteristic elements of the book's child-like style. But on a sophisticated graphic level, their large white spaces also serve to set off the dense spaces that surround them.

Supported by the integrity of the strongly expressive visual and comics language, the tension between naivety and sophistication reaches its most stunning level in the narrative content of *A Disturbing Evening.* Featuring a privately idiosyncratic group of characters including Amy Tilsdale and her friends Jordan, Mark and Jack (the rabbit), the book resembles a child's fantasy playland. Like play-dolls, the characters move from story to story, their activities causally unrelated to each other and their identities often ambiguously shifted.

The childlike vision represented by this narrative approach, of course, has its sophisticated, or adult, underside. It is in the stories "The Mistake" and "Danger in New York," both featuring Jordan Levine, that this underside rises to the surface. In the former, Jordan is killed by a monster. The murder occurs quickly and is practically forgotten until we reach the latter story, 15 pages later, in which Jordan is inexplicably alive again. Accidentally slipping off the top of the Empire State Building, he is saved by the police, only to be taken into their custody and shot twice in the left arm "at point blank range" as "punishment for his crime." The reader is barely given time to adjust to Jordan's being alive when the character is shockingly murdered a second time!

With this grisly reconfrontation with Jordan's death the events in the book irretrievably burst from behind their protective veil of child's fantasy. What was previously an apparent story-land becomes grimly haunting. A woman's head is severed from her neck, a mother and son are mortally stabbed, Jack the rabbit is eaten alive, Mark smashes onto the pavement from several stories up, Tony Target hangs himself . . . by the end, almost all of the book's main characters have died at least once. Amy Tilsdale remains as the sole survivor of this world of carnage. Having witnessed the death of her friends, as well as having had several perilously close calls herself, she becomes the most tragic character of all.

And so, from behind its childlike charm and fantasy, the artist's view emerges. It is an unending paranoid vision of victimization and horror. Most haunting is the book's matter of fact tone, its placid acceptance of a world terror-stricken by suicide, murder and disease. Contrary to the visual element, where the relationship between naivete and sophistication is held in balance, the adult perspective threatens to take primary authority in the book's narrative. One gets the feeling that the stark events being described in *A Disturbing Evening* are not the world of a child's imagination but rather that of an adult's reality.

So we are forced to return to the book's double edged nature. Beyond its adult sense of horror and torment, the book tenaciously retains the self-absorbed energy and vision of a child. In spite of the awful reality that is envisioned, in which police victimize the innocent and innocents are led to suicide, Beyer remains resolute in his desire to remain naive. The book is neither childhood fantasy or adult reality. It is both. This inseparability makes *A Disturbing Evening* a provokingly poignant achievement.

DAVID KASAKOVE

Lemme Outa Here, edited by Diane Noomin. The Print Mint. 36 pages. $1.00.

After sex, dope and cheap thrills, autobiographical experience is probably the most popular subject to be utilized by underground artists. Certainly many of the high points in the ten year history of undergrounds have come about from this form of introspection. The field's first classic was Justin Green's *Binky Brown Meets the Holy Virgin Mary* and its high point remains Art Spiegelman's "Prisoner on the Hell Planet."

Lemme Outa Here is the latest book to follow this route, and it's a very fine one indeed, with insightful work by ten artists who "grew up inside the American Dream." It may well be the best underground comic to appear in recent years.

Michael McMillan's cover of a hot rod jetting into the air unfortunately doesn't convey a sense of the contents of the book. Car culture nostalgia *a la American Graffiti* is completely absent from these recollections of adolescence in suburbia, and so is any sense of escape. Levittown, the real subject of the book, is nicely rendered by McMillan, but fades into the background. It's a strangely toneless cover for an artist whose distinctive strips are often permeated with an indefinable sense of unease and menace.

In the lead story, "Is There Life After Levittown?", Bill Griffith examines the conflict between his adolescent "'art-boy' and 'brat-boy' selves," a conflict one might say has continued through his adulthood in his strips. Elements of the brat-boy side linger here; when young Griffith makes McDonalds hamburgers in his armpit, the customers who object seem to be the villains of the moment. But if the brat-boy wins a few battles, the art-boy has clearly won the war in this beautifully structured and disciplined work.

The anger that was so often a part of Griffith's work is still lurking in the shadows but the overall effect is of a mellow calm, especially in the striking ending that suggests that perhaps Levittown was more the locale of Griffith's inner struggles than a causative factor. These real life vignettes set in a formal structure, drawn with a keen eye for realistic detail, seem to be a change of pace for Griffith from Zippy the Pinhead's fantastic exploits. Of course, one is just the flip side of the other; the same musician playing the same music, only with a different instrument.

Closing *Lemme Outa Here* is "I'd Rather Be Doing Something Else," a densely packed nine page saga by the book's editor Diane Noomin. Subtitled "The DiDi Glitz Story," it's nothing less than an attempt to tell the entire story of the relationship between DiDi and her younger sister Glenda from their childhood to the present. Previous personal epics in underground comics have tended to be the odyssey of a single individual—Binky Brown and his religio-sexual struggles is again a prime example—and Noomin breaks new ground here in her treatment of family relationships, not only between sisters, but between generations, with DiDi's mother Irma and her young daughter Crystal. She succeeds with this ambitious story on every level and must now be considered, if she was not before, one of the field's major artists.

It's interesting to compare this story with "The Fabulous World of DiDi Glitz," which appeared in *Twisted Sisters* two years earlier. In the earlier story DiDi acts as a sort of trademarked character (like Mr. Natural or Zippy) being put through her paces, searching for romance in a series of deftly told but broadly satirical misadventures. She hears of the advice of her friend Marcy's kid sister Glenda to "get hip and fulfil one's hidden desires," and gets a complete external make-over at a beauty haven, which of course doesn't help at all.

Glenda, whose "off-screen" advice was a catalyst in "Fabulous World," becomes DiDi's *own* kid sister in "I'd Rather Be Doing Something Else," sharing stage center and, in fact, narrating most of the story. With her different view of life she adds a needed extra dimension to the Glitz universe. DiDi and her milieu now come into sharp focus. The satirical element is still firmly present (for example, in the absurd get-up of DiDi's dentist boyfriend and in names like Swami Satchalattabolongda), but now the overall tone is of a straight dramatic narrative filled with realistic incident. One is tempted, in fact (as one was not in "Fabulous World"), to infer specific autobiographical references which probably don't exist. I know nothing about Noomin personally, but the portraits here are so sharply drawn that she must intimately know a Glitz family.

Complementing the story, the art has also become more sophisticated. Like the early Bill Griffith, Noomin has not hesitated to use ugly aspects in her drawing style in the service of depicting the ugly elements of her subject matter. In accordance with the basic rule of inseparability of form and content, the increasing sophisication and control in Griffith's style has been coupled with an increased range in subject matter. Similarly, in this story Noomin has modified her cluttered detailed style with an extensive use of scratchboard technique, so that the closer one examines it the more delicate (and even, in a strange way, beautiful) it seems. The style is apt for the story, which at first glance seems to depend on ugly caricatures, but which, as one digs into it, tells an ironic and moving tale.

Diane Noomin has set herself standards of excellence on all levels here that will be difficult to top—but one can look forward to seeing her try.

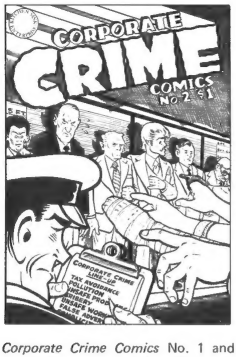
The other nine page story in the issue is "Oh Camp So Dear," by Aline Kominsky, correctly subtitled "Compulsively Honest—Repulsively Revealing." Inserted into four pages of summer camp reminiscence are five pages that deal with a recent sordid affair, within which, in turn, is a flashback to another incident. No rationale is given for this skipping around in time, nor does any artistic purpose seem immediately apparent. Kominsky's recollections of camp are, like the other good work in this book, packed with sharp detail, and successfully recreate that hellish dawning of adolescence which even nostalgia can't entirely sugar coat. Interestingly, the constant self-flagellation that mars some of her work isn't so strong here; she even "gets her man" at the camp dance. The other pages of the story are less successful and seem outside the scope of this book. They're also cruder than the rest of the story, almost as if they were drawn at an earlier time.

Kim Deitch's "TV and Me" avoids the personal childhood anecdote and instead presents the hilarious meandering conversation of a nearly mythical gathering of typically Deitchian present-day misfits who discuss the merits of fifties trash TV shows. It is typical of Deitch that his story is about adults longing for fifties childhood in a book of stories that deal with yearning for release from the same childhood. Deitch has managed before to technically stay within the confines of theme books with change-of-pace stories that complement the work of the other contributors. In *Sleazy Scandals of the Silver Screen*, for example, where all the other artists' contributions were meticulously based on previously published "facts" about Hollywood scandals, Deitch wrote a highly speculative solution to an unsolved murder scandal.

Fine one and two page vignettes are contributed by Robert Armstrong, Robert Crumb, Justin Green, Mark Beyer and M.K. Brown. Beyer's page, perhaps the best thing he's done, deserves special mention. It's more directly autobiographical than his other work, yet it still manages to contain his haunting childlike images of violence. Unlike his co-contributors, who seem to be glancing back at a period that, with the perspective of hindsight, wasn't really that bad, Beyer seems to offer little chance of escape.

Lemme Outa Here exemplifies the kind of high point in underground comics that offers proof that the original impetus of the form is still strong and vibrant, and infused with an increased maturity.

JOHN BENSON



Corporate Crime Comics No. 1 and 2, edited by Leonard Rifas. Kitchen Sink Enterprises. Each: 36 pages. $1.00.

Karen Silkwood was killed in a mysterious car crash in 1974 as she drove to meet a *New York Times* reporter, carrying documents intended to expose the Kerr-McGee nuke corporation (her employer) for flagrant plutonium contamination. Silkwood was the stuff of whom a realistic popular heroine could be made; she ought to rate a comic book of her own. Until then, the cover (by Greg Irons) and five-page lead story (by R. Diggs) of *Corporate Crime* # 1, published more than two years ago, will have to suffice.

But more than that, the Silkwood story in *Corporate Crime* (which editor Leonard Rifas helped script) actually conveys the drama, the heroism and the ambiguities of the Silkwood case better than any combination of half-hour TV news specials, six-column news analyses, or learned partisan treatises based on the same material, done before or since this worthy Kitchen Sink book. (Most of the big disclosures and diatribes *in re* Silkwood, excepting Howard Kohn's groundbreaking articles in *Rolling Stone*, have appeared long since *Corporate Crime* # 1. The recent spectacle of mass media flashbacks to the Silkwood case, performed with unseemly haste in the aftermath of the Harrisburg nuke accident and the 10.5 million dollar Kerr-McGee settlement with the Silkwood family, followed years of lethargic inattention, and makes the story in *Corporate Crime* all the more an achievement.) The ample text weighs heavily on too few postage-stamp-size panels—I'd have preferred a seven-page Silkwood story—but Diggs is in command of action and expression even in the panels so compressed. Like most opuses in underground comics, the story has flaws and spots that look amateurish, but overall it's a model of documentary adaptation.

My only quibble concerning Irons' excellent cover—that the clean rendition of Silkwood at a dramatic moment is clumsily placed under a tacky logo (which may or may not be Irons' work, but in any case should've been undone by Rifas and/or Kitchen)—is symptomatic of what troubles and disappoints me about *Corporate Crime* in general. Each issue contains some brilliant work and some that's merely routine, but each (if only by virtue of the serious, true-to-life subject matter and the presumed theme indicated by the title) must be measured against a higher, or at any rate *different*, standard than your typical issue of *Zap*, *Bijou* or *Snarf*, or any book which is mainly a showcase for one artist/writer. As a political comic book and as a "concept" book—two reasonable standards to apply—*Corporate Crime* pleases me less than, say, the last two issues (numbers 8 and 9) of *Slow Death*, or such one-shots as *Radical America Comix* and *Cover-Up Lowdown*. *Corporate Crime*, alas, is wildly inconsistent as to both quality and quantity of pages devoted to each story, but in this it is deficient only in ways pretty much endemic (and epidemic) in underground comix.

Forget scripts and artwork for the nonce, and consider lettering and editing. Throughout both issues of *Corporate Crime* the stories are replete with the letterer's (which is to say, the artist's) egregious spelling and punctuation flubs, and inconsistent or just plain cruddy lettering (Sharon Rudahl's in particular).

But *Corporate Crime* does, in fact, succeed to a surprising degree in the task Rifas sets for it (in as literal a way as he could: Rifas, as drawn by Rifas, plays a sort of Corrupt Keeper who introduces himself on the inside front covers (trudging and mulling and muttering about "corporate atrocity stories"). Particularly in the stories he wrote and drew (on the 1914 Ludlow massacre of Colorado miners and on dioxin poisoning in Seveso, Italy, circa 1976—the latter story a nice blend of photo collage and illustration), Rifas' work as editor/scripter is flawless. In "Ludlow Massacre" (# 1), his simple and unfinished-looking drawings are an asset, and text is less windy and obtrusive than almost anything else in the two issues.

Another four-page treatment of American labor history, Trina Robbins' "The Triangle Fire" in # 2, is magnificent. Like the Silkwood story, it too merits expansion beyond the cramped few pages it is allotted. Robbins' talents as an illustrator are better showcased here than anywhere I've ever seen: several panels of sweatshop scenes, of the conflagration that killed 146 women and of the mourners and memorial marchers are stunning.

But yet another cavil: Robbins is also represented in *Corporate Crime* # 1 with a trivial two-pager on getting ripped off by an airline scam, a peccadillo that is, simply, no better or no worse than most of the Bay Area hippie output, but jarring in its self-indulgence (to the point of a "reccomended" (sic) San Francisco travel agency being duly plugged at the end). Anyway, *one* Robbins story is a killer and the *other* is just, well, filler.

From nukes, Nixon and agribusiness—to labor wars and nursing homes—as you've no doubt gathered, *Corporate Crime* covers a lot of ground; indeed, it covers both too much ground (in its superabundance of subject matter) and not enough (in the cases of some of the better stories, chiefly those by Diggs and Rifas and two remarkable stories by Greg Irons, all of which could have used another page or two of texture and detail).

In # 2 there's a four page story on the Westinghouse nuclear reactor plant in the Philippines. Only ten panels long—and filled with multiple images of traffic jams, rain forests, funny animals, obnoxious animals, guerrillas and explosions—it is superb . . . and unsigned. Publisher Denis Kitchen says that the artist prefers to remain anonymous.

All the material is meticulously footnoted, with full bibliographies, which is commendable but also magnifies the clutter. Less clutter might have meant less credibility, but with nine or ten narratives attempted in each issue (not even counting half-pagers and one-pagers) some readers may be left reeling. The traditional overground comic book format of three to five stories approximately equal in length, with fewer artists represented and more of the editor's steadying influence, would have yielded stronger books.

Still: praise be to Irons for "Minimata" in # 1, which packs at least the impact of W. Eugene Smith's photographs of those same Japanese victims of industrial pollution and mercury poisoning, and for "Genocide" in # 2, a tract on Brazil featuring conquistadores as grisly as S. Clay Wilson pirates, but *for real*. Huzzahs to Larry Rippee, whose three pages on the 1920s Teapot Dome scandal in # 1 left me far from floored, but who reappeared in # 2 with a story on the J.P. Stevens textile company (the corporate villain closest to my own heart, since I work for the union trying to organize Stevens) that deftly combines Serious Constructive Intent with Mutt and Jeff (who are the perfect solution to the problem, "How do you translate J.P. Stevens' crimes into a comic book?"). Torrents of praise for Peter Poplaski, whose "ITT Scandal" story (# 1) and the cover of # 2 are so true-to-Chester Gould that the essences of a certain Grand Guignol collection of Prunehead prototypes—Watergaters John Mitchell, Jeb Magruder, E. Howard Hunt and Dita Beard—are captured perfectly.

And good for Leonard Rifas for at least aspiring to edit, rather than merely assemble, a book that should be more than a two-shot. *Corporate Crime* clearly isn't on a par with Kurtzman's theme issues of the EC war comics (civil war, Changjin Reservoir and Iwo Jima issues, arguably the prime achievements of documentary comics), but then, what is?

For sure, virtually *nothing* is that issues from the corporate maw of the Warner-Cadence-Syndicates-Licensing combine, the giant conglomeratrophying the overground books. So go out and buy *Corporate Crime*.

JOE PILATI

Dear Mr. Eisner—

Is it really true that the Spirit never carries a gun and if so, how can he possibly continue to overcome well-armed thugs?

Yours truly
A. J.
Newark, N. J.

OH WELL, THAT EXPLAINS IT! GOSH, FOR A MOMENT THERE IT LOOKED BAD... ONE MIGHT THINK THAT YOU WANTED DIGIT TO BE AT LARGE.. SO HE'D BE BLAMED IF ANYTHING HAPPENED TO YOUR HUSBAND!
MISTER SPIRIT, YOU ARE A VERY BRIGHT YOUNG MAN, BUT I AM A VERY DESPERATE WOMAN! NOW SUPPOSE WE DISCUSS THIS ON MY TERMS!

FOOD IS REAL IMPORTANT WHEN YOU'RE STRANDED OUT IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE! I'M HUNGRY, ARE YOU!
YOU BET YOUR GODDAMN FUCKIN' ASS JACK!!
ZIPPY "HEARS" THE TALKING OAR!!

COMIC BOOK SECTION

Follow THE SPIRIT Daily in The Record

RECORD PHILADELPHIA

ACTION Mystery ADVENTURE

SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 1942

Copyright, 1942, by Eveeen M. Arnold

WAIT.... DON'T GO AWAY !! WAIT !!
UGH... JUST A SECOND... UGH.. WHILE I... CLIMB DOWN !!
BY Will Eisner
AHHH... GOOD EVENING, EVERYONE !!
SHHH... COME HERE !! I'VE A SECRET TO TELL YOU !!
I AM MR. HUSH !!
HUSH, THE WHISPERER !!! HEHSSSS ... HEHSSS... HEHSS.....